

## Dance

# Ailey's 40-year love affair

It's with modern dance, of course

By Elizabeth Zimmer  
Herald Examiner dance critic

Alvin Ailey began dancing more than 40 years ago in Los Angeles. He was chasing money then — to keep the operation of his mentor, Lester Horton, alive. He's chasing money now, in the 30th season of his own Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Though one of the best-established and most popular touring ensembles in the world, the 30-member troupe is carrying a deficit of \$750,000.

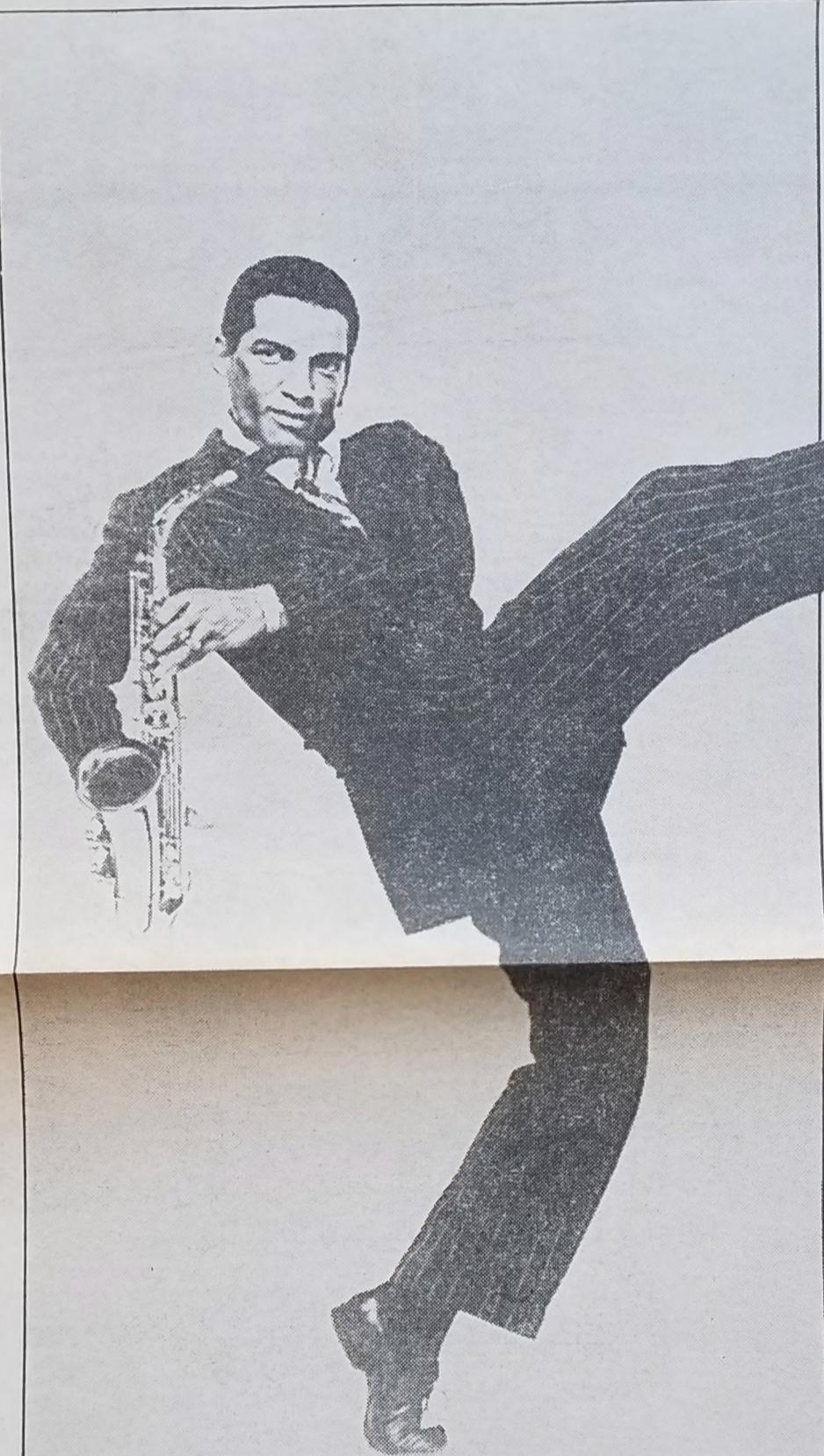
"People could close us up at any moment," noted the 58-year-old choreographer, whose company has been in Palm Springs this week prior to its spring season at the Wiltern Theater, from Tuesday through March 19, sponsored by UCLA's Center for the Performing Arts. A graduate of L.A.'s Jefferson High School, he was visiting his mother before heading back to work.

For 10 years, Ailey's troupe has had subsidized space in the Minskoff Building in Manhattan. In its beautifully equipped studios with glass walls overlooking the show biz bustle of Times Square, the company can rehearse constantly, and an accredited school attracts 2,000 students from all over the world, especially Paris, Japan and Brazil. "The space is spectacular," says Ailey. "It's a dream." Special scholarship programs feed dancers into the company, which takes about half its members from the school.

But their lease is up in May, and they can't afford to renew it. After several cliffhanging months, during which Ailey "was ready to let it go," a new space has been located on Manhattan's far west side, behind Lincoln Center. For the moment, at least, the school and company have a future.

"You need a place to be!" asserted the harassed patriarch. A homeless dance company is about as helpless as a homeless family on the streets of New York, and much bigger.

At 58, Ailey is a contemporary of several other great masters of American modern dance: Paul Taylor, for instance, and Murray Louis and



**The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater**, with Gary DeLoatch in "For Bird With Love," will perform at the Wiltern Theater beginning on Tuesday. The company, now in its 30th season, concludes its run there on March 19.

Alwin Nikolais. But while these artists have managed to buy real estate to secure their futures personally, Ailey says, "I'll never have a house in the country. It's not forthcoming in this life. You do this because you love it. You never get to do what you want to do ... but I haven't stopped yet. All the young kids involved with modern dance are going to love it no matter how difficult it is. Whenever I get depressed, I go down to the school and see that love of self, that joy and beauty.

"Dancing is a disease," he continued. "You have to love it. You have to be crazy like me."

Ailey is concerned that his company, which has always been multir-

acial, has fewer white dancers than it used to. He'll be auditioning dancers this spring, in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., as well as New York, "but I would take anybody whose hips don't work the right way. There's a certain juice they have to have."

Ailey was drawn into dance through the happy accident of having gone to high school here with Carmen de Lavallade. He started following her around, and she drew him into the circle of Lester Horton, whose studio at 7566 Melrose Ave. "was full of joy, creativity and love."

Simultaneously dancing and attending college to become a teacher of Romance languages, Ailey was devastated by Horton's premature

"Dancing is a disease. You have to love it. You have to be crazy like me."

**Alvin Ailey**

death in 1953. He and de Lavallade took the company to Jacob's Pillow the summer after Horton died, and were spotted by a producer who invited them into the Broadway show "House of Flowers," with Pearl Bailey.

Thus began a decade in which the expenses of doing their own work, of constructing costumes and renting studios, were met by their salaries as Broadway dancers. Around the edges of the commercial work, he "did the young modern dancer thing," studying and performing with Donald McKayle, Anna Sokolow, Sophie Maslow and other modern pioneers. Ailey was an experimental choreographer in the late '50s, and his work was greeted with invitations to tour internationally, and by a series of State Department tours that established his reputation in Russia, Japan and all over Africa.

Now the company has a dazzling evening of the works of Katherine Dunham, but Los Angeles will not get to see it because UCLA can't afford to provide the extra stagehands it requires or meet the extra shipping charges for the trunks full of fabulous costumes. It also has new works by young choreographer Donald Byrd, three ballets by Ulysses Dove, "the most inventive guy around," and Ailey classics that immortalized great black musicians, like Charlie "Bird" Parker, long before the movies got around to them.

Ailey knows he could quit at any time and have a lucrative career in Europe, where he gets respect, invitations to choreograph and substantial support from well-funded state arts institutions. He's working with journalist Peter Bailey on a biography, to be published by Knopf. You just know that while the book will "set the record straight" about the complexities of Ailey's professional life, it will also teem with stories about some of the most exciting dancers ever to grace our stages, including Judith Jamison, who now has a company of her own but is touring with Ailey as a coach and "mother figure."

You also sense, somehow, that Ailey is a fighter, and an American, and that no matter what he has to do to keep his company and his school operating on these shores, he'll find a way to do it.

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# TIME

THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE

## DANCE

### Out of Pride

"Look!" cries Choreographer-Dancer Alvin Ailey. "Look what you've made! Look how beautiful it is. It's yours. You did it out of adversity. Don't you feel a little dignity about yourself? Be proud of it."

Ailey's impassioned plea is directed at his American Negro brethren. His mission is to awaken an appreciation of "the trembling beauty" of the Negro's cultural heritage—through dance, through "the exuberance of his jazz, the ecstasy of his spirituals, and the dark rapture of his blues." Trouble is, nobody is listening—in the U.S., that is. But in Europe the message is echoing loud and clear: the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, consisting of eleven young Negro dancers, has created perhaps the biggest sensation on the Continent since the tour of Jerome Robbins' *Ballets: U.S.A.* six years ago.

**Under Rhythm.** In London, once a wasteland for modern dance, the company was held over for an unprecedented run of six weeks. Sweeping through Germany this month, they scored one resounding triumph after another, including an unheard-of 61 curtain calls in Hamburg. Wrote Die Welt's Klaus Geitel, "They are not stuck to the rhythm. They run under it, draw circles around it. They dance its impulses in the most manifold way and with a glorious freedom. It is a triumph of sweeping, violent beauty, a furious spectacle. The stage vibrates. One has never seen anything like it."

The company's repertory ranges from the raw brutality and passion in Talley Beatty's classic jazz ballet, *The Road of the Phoebe Snow*, to the chill-

ingly abstract study of loneliness in Anna Sokolow's *Rooms*. Ailey's own *Roots of the Blues* and *Revelations* are danced with savage grace and élan.

*Roots* traces the evolution of the blues from the barrel houses of New Orleans to the speakeasy era; *Revelations*, drawing on Negro spirituals, evokes the hope and despair of a beleaguered people.

**Lost Money.** Now 34, Ailey is the son of a farm worker his mother hasn't seen for more than 30 years. An all-round athlete in high school, he gave up sports to join the Lester Horton Dance Studio. After 3½ semesters of college, he came to Manhattan and appeared in several Broadway productions, finally saved enough to form his own small troupe. By 1961 the company had worked up to four concerts a year, "all the time losing money like mad." The State Department spotted it and in 1962 sent it on a successful tour of the Far East. Then came three months in Australia, where its appearance was hailed as "the most stark and devastating theater ever presented on the Australian stage."



DOMINIC  
AILEY (FRONT) & DANCERS  
Exuberance, ecstasy and dark rapture.

TIME, MAY 28, 1965

TIME, MAY 28, 1965

# The New York Times

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1965.

## Dance: Nothing Less Than Superb

### Alvin Ailey Brings His World Fame Back

By CLIVE BARNES

THE return of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company was well and truly accomplished on Friday at the Hunter College Playhouse, where the troupe was replacing the Donald McKayle Company as part of the splendid Hunter College Modern Dance Series. Since Mr. Alley last brought his company here, it has won enormous recognition in Europe. It is easy to see why.

The Ailey company is nothing less than superb—but we already underrate it. The program included nothing new, but there was something borrowed and plenty that was most magnificently blue. Indeed, with one patch of blue, Mr. Alley's own "Blues Suite," the choreography had been considerably reworked and here and there replaced, but essentially Mr. Alley concentrated on the works that have made him one of the theatrical sensations of the international dance world. He probably figured that would be enough. It was.

Two works choreographed by Talley Beatty, "Congo Tango Palace" and "The Road of the Phoebe Snow," added variety. "Congo Tango Palace," taken from Mr. Beatty's longer "Come and Get the Beauty of It Hot" is a sizzlingly svelte dance suite set in Spanish Harlem and most effectively fused Spanish and Negro dance elements. A newcomer to the cast was Miguel Godreau, who danced with fascinating elasticity and the wayward

of a none-too-frightened

fan. Yet the whole company, shooting out their legs like devils, swaying their hips, bouncing and swooping happily looked just fine.

"The Road of the Phoebe Snow," Mr. Beatty's explosive work, is evocatively named for the Lackawanna Railroad line, where Mr. Beatty has set his part-symbolic, part-realistic ballet of gang warfare, mass rape, innocent love and suicide.

Mr. Beatty's choreography has a vigor and laconic beauty that admirably match the Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn music. The tragic young lovers unable to escape from the neighborhood gang are now played by the touching and agonized Takako Asakawa and the toughly bewildered Morton Winston. With its vivid dance images, its excitingly imaginative construction, its fire and angry fury, "Phoebe Snow" ranks as one of the great achievements of jazz dance. Indeed, it is the singlehanded answer to any who doubt whether jazz dance has a potentiality as a full theatrical idiom. Great.

Mr. Ailey's own share of the program was dominated by his masterpiece, "Revelations," but before this Dudley Williams was bitterly, corrosively brilliant in Mr. Ailey's savagely fluent solo to The Ellington "Reflections in D." The revised version of "Blues Suite," which includes quite a few new numbers, including one sinuously led by that splendid stylist, James Truitte, has been tightened and tautened.

But "Blues Suite," for all its choreographic expertise, fades into insignificance beside Mr. Alley's wonderful

### Company Performs in Series at Hunter

"Revelations." For here is a profound Negro document, a dance realization of the roots of the Negro spiritual, full of chain-gang anger, human aspiration, a rich, buoyant compassion and, eventually, a joyousness, shadowed and yet deep-felt. It is also one of those rare dance works that is a genuinely religious ballet.

Mr. Alley is, of course, a modern-dance choreographer by design and only a Negro by chance, and the interest of the work is not specifically Negro despite its use of Negro spirituals. For Mr. Alley is here employing his own choreographic technique, which came largely from Lester Horton and his West Coast school, to illuminate his music. The result is an infinitely moving hymn to God and, perhaps more, man.

There were a few newcomers to the cast, including Judith Jamison, who proved excellent in the starkly effective "Fix Me Jesus" duet with James Truitte, and Clive Thompson, who found just the right revivalist fervor for the "Wading in the Water" episode that Mr. Alley, who was not dancing last night himself once performed. The whole company looked fresh and wonderfully well rehearsed.

Adding to the evening's success was the always-sensitive lighting of Nicola Cernovitch and the newly installed sound equipment. (Thank you, Hunter College; it's a pleasure to sit there not wearing earplugs.)



3 Complete Programs, Choreography by

ALVIN AILEY  
TALLEY BEATTY  
LESTER HORTON  
LOUIS JOHNSON  
ANNA SOKOLOW  
JOYCE TRISLER  
JAMES TRUITTE

# NEW YORK Herald Tribune

Saturday, December 18, 1965

## ALVIN AILEY DANCE TROUPE: STUNNING

By Walter Terry

"The cultural heritage of America's Negro is one of America's richest treasures," writes Alvin Ailey for the program which accompanies the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater. "From his roots as a slave, the American Negro—sometimes sorrowing, sometimes jubilant, but always hopeful—has created a legacy of music and dance which have touched, illuminated and influenced the most remote preserves of world civilization."

"I and my dance theater celebrate, in our program, this trembling beauty. We bring you the exuberance of his jazz, the ecstasy of his spirituals, and the dark rapture of his blues."

Mr. Ailey lives up to his promise in a repertory which includes not only his own choreographies but major works by other dance creators.

A stunning segment of this repertory was presented by the Ailey dancers (Mr. Ailey himself did not perform) last night at the Hunter College Playhouse as the second modern dance event in the second season of Hunter Dance Series.

The current Ailey company is a brilliant one—it includes three dancers from Martha Graham's group—with the men dancers, perhaps, having the edge. These males range from the company's senior dancer, James Truitte, who is wonderfully suave, enormously versatile and in full command of the stage, to Miguel Godreau, of bantam size but of atomic energy. Yes, he's kinetic.

tically explosive and a whiz of a dancer.

These gentlemen and the ladies gave us the Congo Tango Palace scene, a hot and racy number, impudent and inventive from Talley Beatty's major work, "Come and Get the Beauty of It Hot;" also Mr. Ailey's marvelous "Blues Suite," dark and gay by turns and always motivated by invincible, irresistible rhythms.

Mr. Beatty's great work—finest creation—"The Road of the Phoebe Snow" was done in its entirety. As Mr. Alvin indicates in his preface to his repertory, multiple aspects of the American Negro are sources for choreography.

Here, Mr. Beatty works a magical (and one would have thought impossible) fusion of adapted ballet, modern dance, jazz, dramatic action, idio-

matic gesture and even acrobatics. And it's superb.

The program offered solo, Mr. Ailey's "Reflections in D." danced by Dudley Williams. It is an abstraction, what it does is to take movements of the body and fluidity of torso, shoulder, arms as a theme, create really strong images of dance for the sake of dancing.

To close the program was an Ailey masterwork, "Revelations," a visual celebration of Negro spirituals, sad and joyous, pensive and, at times, riotously humorous. This was, indeed, one of the best programs that the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater has given, one which fully justified its director's statement of purpose.

## DANCE VIEW

CLIVE BARNES

# A Quick Spin Around the World's Stages

**A**lthough dance, like the theater and music, measures its life in seasons that don't conform to the calendar, the end of a year does offer a special temptation for retrospection. What was dance like in 1974? Let's look briefly—around the world in thousand words.

In the United States it was active. Maurice Béjart once suggested that the 20th century would be recognized as the century of the dance. He could be right. Dance is currently America's only growth industry. The amount of dance all over the country is enormous—particularly when compared with the situation only 10 years ago. Mind you, this activity can easily be exaggerated, and often is. Dance is still an elated interest. Not only is there no comparison between the number of people interested in dance and those interested in sports, many more people across the country and, for that matter in New York, go to the movies or the theater. Dance's popularity is beginning to catch up with that of classical music and opera, but even this does not take into account the vast number of people who receive their musical fare from recordings and radio.

The economic crunch on the arts has, of course, been felt in dance. This year we have lost one company, the National Ballet of Washington. It was a good company. Its demise was unlucky, untidy and careless. Two other companies have sent up frantic warning signals—the San Francisco Ballet and the Harkness Ballet. On the credit side, one of America's most truly creative classic choreographers, Eliot Feld, has been enabled by grants from the Rockefeller and Shubert Foundations, and the gift of a working place from Joseph Papp, to create a new and potentially very important company. Ruth Page has struggled, and at last gotten together, the basics of a new company in Chicago.

Resident companies have done well. New York City Ballet has gone on dancing like the well-oiled machine it is, and has come up with the controversial "Dybbuk Variations" by Jerome Robbins and Leonard Bernstein, and Balanchine's effortlessly authoritative version of "Coppélia." For American Ballet Theater it has been the year of the stars—the year when Leningrad defector Mikhail Baryshnikov joined the great Ballet Theater roster and added his personal charisma to a company that has almost an embarrassment of riches. The Joffrey Ballet, just back triumphant from Russia, has also had a good season at home, even though one might have questioned the wisdom of reviving Léonide Massine's "Pulicinia." The Pennsylvania Ballet has become a national troupe.

Modern-dance? This is definably the one special art form indigenous to America, having derived from the inspiration of Isadora Duncan and the practical help of the Denishawn School. This season two old companies, the José Limón Dance Company and, even more especially, the Martha Graham Dance Company, have

made sizable advances. The smaller groups and lesser-known choreographers have had less success. Major modern-dance companies—Nikolais, Louis, Taylor—have all appeared on Broadway, but there seems to be an increasing gap between the well-known and the slightly-known in modern-dance. The Alvin Ailey Company proved sensational success at City Center and made its Lincoln Center debut.

Just as New York is indisputably the dance capital of the world, so London is indisputably dance's second city. This year the Royal Ballet played New York with enormous success. This is a great machine for dancing and has magnificent dancers. Kenneth MacMillan's reputation as artistic director, however, was not greatly enhanced by his new ballet, "Manon." London's Festival Ballet (London's Number Two) had a good season, and Britain's various modern-dance companies seem to be settling into the British landscape.

From Russia the news is bad. The Bolshoi undertook a few Western engagements. Its engagement in London, with a new and eccentric "Swan Lake," was—to be charitable—disappointing. The concert party it sent to

## Alvin Ailey— A Remarkable Year

By DON McDONAGH

With the end of its third winter season a week ago, Alvin Ailey's City Center Dance Theater has closed out a quietly remarkable year in its life. It has become, in a short time, a fixture of the dance year with regular seasons at City Center plus its first excursion to State Theater at Lincoln Center this past summer. It has emerged in fact, if not in name, as a modern-dance repertory company.

Ailey himself regularly produces new dances which remain active for varying periods, and some of them have become permanent additions to the company's programs. It would be almost impossible to think of the Ailey company without "Revelations," which it is constantly pressed to schedule by an enthusiastic public. But in addition to such crowd pleasers, Ailey seeks out pieces from other choreographers whose work he admires, and keeps them before a public which tends to forget works which are not frequently performed.

This season he scored a major coup with the revival of "Portrait of Billie," by John Butler. It is a warm and anything but sentimental tribute to the late blues singer Billie Holiday, who was known by admirers as "Lady Day." Both Judith Jamison and Sara Yarborough danced the leading role, and Miss Yarborough slipped into it as if pouring herself into a shoulder-length satin glove. She was smart, sophisticated and possessed of an elegant reserve that caught the feeling of Miss Holiday splendidly. Miss Holiday led a tormented personal life, but with the philosopher's tone of her voice she turned the leaden daily grind into golden performances. Miss Yarborough captured that magic quality.

Ailey is a product of the West Coast training of Lester Horton, whose school in Los Angeles was a home for talented performers and choreographers such as Joyce Trisler, Carmen De Lavallade and James Truitte, to name only a few. Hardly a season passes without his reminding the cloistered East Coast of his heritage. This year he revived Miss Trisler's "Journey." The music is Charles Ives' "The Unanswered Question," which has intrigued several choreographers, but Miss Trisler

has laid a strong claim to it with her utterly simple but engrossing solo work. It is the story of a search which never ends and is designed to be danced in a sustained slow manner that is brutally demanding yet looks deceptively easy. Mari Kajiwara and Tina Yuan both moved through it like dreams in slow motion.

Among the other works revived were Ailey's own "Feast of Ashes," a dance interpretation of Lorca's play, "The House of Bernarda Alba." The piece lacks the

intensity of the drama. Instead, though, it provides vehicles for individual dancers such as Donna Wood as the despotic matriarch, and Ulysses Dove as the doomed young man who refuses to stay engaged to the "right" daughter. The one new work

Don McDonagh is a dance critic for The Times.

DECEMBER 29, 1974

# Dance

New York did not dispel this impression. Leningrad's Kirov Ballet did not give full-scale performances in the West during this period.

Valery and Galina Panov were given exit visas after some diplomatic skirmishing, and Mikhail Baryshnikov defected. In Leningrad it was not a good year.

The year was great in Canada, largely due to the efforts

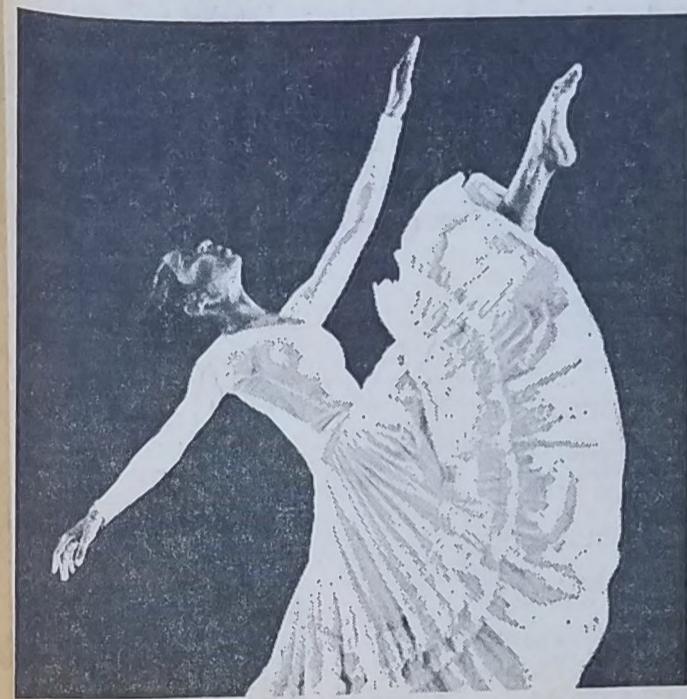
of Rudolf Nureyev—now the catalyst of Western dance—for the National Ballet of Canada. And I was moderately impressed with what I saw of the Australian Ballet.

Normally I see ballet in Denmark and the Netherlands every year, but this year for the first time in more than a decade I missed out on both. In both countries, I am sure, dance is proceeding as usual, yet neither country makes quite such imperative demands upon the international dance critic as it once did. Germany's Stuttgart company was a great success in London, and I saw with interest John Neumeier's company in Hamburg. Had schedules worked out better I would have liked to have seen Alfonso Cata's company in Frankfurt, and to have checked out what Patricia Neary was doing in Geneva. The revival of "Excelsior" in Rome did not have me running or even walking.

One international growth company that keeps raising my interest is the Paris Opéra Ballet. This is traditionally the laughing stock of the dance world. I see it every year in Paris and dutifully. But the company has some wonderful, if virtually unknown dancers. Maybe it has nowhere to go but up, but year after year the Paris Opéra keeps on getting better. Now, probably all it needs is a choreographer. But there is scarcely a company I have mentioned (exclude City Ballet) that does not need a choreographer. That is life.

this season was John Jones's "Nocturne," a brief solo for Dudley Williams and part of a projected three-sectioned piece. Since it is really a dance in progress, in all fairness one should wait until it is completed before judging this isolated fragment. Among other revivals was Tally Beatty's "The Road of the Phoebe Snow," which has a deserved and honorable place in our dance gallery.

Besides showing off his beautiful company, Ailey makes us think about where modern-dance came from, what its roots are. He is the only modern-dance company head who demonstrates a historic sense of the ebb and flow of choreographic achievement. The repertory system (works by many hands) is happily accepted in ballet, music, drama and the performing arts generally, but not, ordinarily, in the world of modern-dance. With varied repertory also comes the opportunity to appreciate dancers as performers aside from being the chosen creative instruments of one choreographer at one special time. Ailey makes us look at his dancers as well as at the dances themselves. It may seem a small point, but it has produced the first modern-dance star in Judith Jamison. She had been seen with other companies but flowered in the setting that was provided for her by Ailey. The season was, one might say, a typical one for this company, but in its typicality it is achieving a revolution in our viewing.



Sara Yarborough in "Cry"

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## STAGE VIEW

WALTER KERR

## A Sly, Scaled-Down And Charming 'Charley'

**R**evels are never a waste of time. You always learn something, even when the entertainment is being trotted out for a second go at the track is something as inconsequential as a musical version of "Charley's Aunt." Certainly I didn't realize, when I first saw the Frank Loesser-George Abbott rearrangement known as "Where's Charley?", precisely how delicate—how deliberately delicate—Mr. Loesser's gentlemanly score was.

Admittedly it seems a shade more tinkling now because the entrepreneurs at Circle in the Square have abandoned the notion of using a costly full orchestra and have confined the accompaniment to a kind of string-and-pianoforte birdsong coming from high atop a pergola—just six pieces tucked away in the garden branches. That's like exchanging a waterfall for a teapout.

But if you listen to the tunes again you'll realize that Mr. Loesser knew what he was doing in the first place and that what he was doing was creating a chamber musical for a mezzotint world, paying a kind of constant compliment to springtime. (Everything is lilac lavender or buttercup yellow in Theodore Mann's new staging, reinforcing the feeling that the fooling is all April fooling.) We just didn't quite hear it the first time for the simple reason that in those days—about 26 years ago—we expected musicals to come down upon our heads with cymbal-proud thump, and kept listening only for the six/eight energy of "The Ashmolean Marching Society" or the Latin-American heel-clickings of "Pernambuco."

But those two numbers, mockingly agreeable as they are, are the only "big" numbers in "Where's Charley?" And they are big only in sound; they don't loom large in the shape of the show. The shape of the show is determined by something else, by two lovers fidgeting shyly 'round and about the rattan lawn-chairs whose backs are fanned out into peacock's tails, by Charley himself all alone with the audience introducing "Once in Love With Amy" in no more than a whisper. It's a duet-and-solo show, and when the house heaves a sigh of delight and begins begging for more it's because one, or at the most two, people have made rousing climaxes out of an imperturbable intimacy.

Perhaps that's why, when "Where's Charley?" was first done, it seemed only a fairish entertainment boosted to success by Ray Bolger. Now, listening with ears that don't demand thunderclaps by the dozen, we can hear Mr. Loesser's filigreed intentions more clearly. Oh, we always knew that "Make a Miracle" was a superb duo; it was imitated so widely in the following decade that I fully expected it to replace the National Anthem. (I regret to say that it is overburdened with coy "business" in the current mounting, losing the enchanting sobriety with which Amy looks forward to the marvels of the 20th century while her equally earnest suitor thinks only of the marvels of her.)

But what about "My Darling, My Darling," in which Jerry Lanning and Carol Jo Lugenbeal (as Jack and Kitty) slip so demurely into their expressions of mutual admiration that you're scarcely aware of the furtive crescendo they're building? It's a stunning surprise to discover that a song that seems no more than a conventional romantic ballad, and sung with Edwardian discretion at that, should be sneaking toward such a finish. At its conclusion on opening night at Circle in the Square, the gingersly dalliance with a sweet but surprisingly commanding melody could have been reprised six or eight times, then and there.

And what about "Lovelier Than Ever," equally graceful nearly as luring? As for "Once in Love With Amy," the lazy schottische that Ray Bolger once soft-shoed into more encore than his exhausted conductors were likely to thank him for, it's a number that gets along quite nicely—so long as you treat it nicely—in other hands, on other feet. Raul Julia is the new Charley, an impeccable choice. Impeccable because he doesn't press, has no need to.

Mr. Julia is a deceptive fellow, born abashed but secretly dangerous. He may have the most ingratiating leer since Chico Marx, a leer that proclaims itself when he is smiling most modestly. His sloe-eyes lurk wantonly beneath very chaste lids, he seems to be erasing himself from the landscape when he is really preparing to spring, he can stand still and play straight while insulting everyone in sight, including the girl of his dreams. He is ready with a fast curve when his authors require one, literally spinning saucers through the air to those who care for tea, adopting the rocking gait of a seashore ostrich when he is decked out in black skirts and borrowed ringlets.

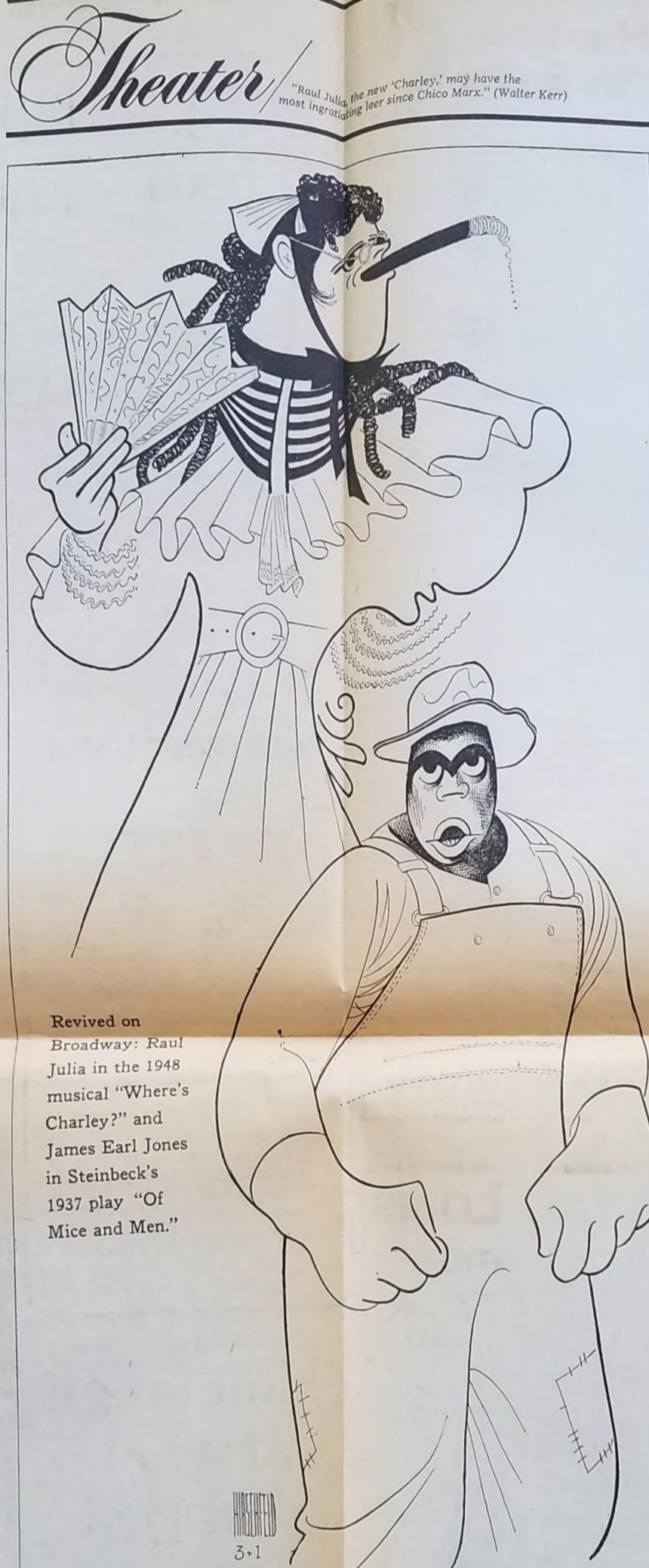
Essentially, though, he is a man who bides his time, content to hold his straw hat in his hand until he can hit someone with it, and so, when it comes to "Amy," he is prepared for the best. He does no more than undulate his eyebrows rhythmically while the first notes are being struck at hushed-clavichord tap, then, with the opening "I caught you, sir," he is chatting lyrically if accusingly with those members of the audience who have given undue attention to his true love. In time, he is more active than that: spinning around a bandstand center-pole like a soon-to-topple top, diving over garden swings and pools into the arms of waiting saviors.

But he has come to his eruptions slyly, which is how Mr. Loesser's score is meant to work. Not everything about this new "Charley" is top-drawer, to be sure. The stage space in the Ursis basement is too narrow to bring Margo Sappington's choreography into sharp, unfussed focus. Mr. Manz worries too much about keeping his marionettes in perpetual motion. Though the girls' costumes are lovely, Amy (Marcia McClain) is provided with ballooning sleeves that leave the poor girl without a neck. When anything goes wrong, it's because less would have done. But the charm is there, and I think you'll succumb to it.

## Steinbeck Revisited

I didn't need a revival of John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men" to tell me that James Earl Jones and Kevin Conway were fine actors. I'm grateful to have seen them at work in the play, though, because they're refusal to be bound by past inflections. Mr. Conway, for instance, swiftly discards the dreamy, quasi-poetic softnesses associated with George, the bindlestiff who takes care of his less-than-bright charge, Lennie. Instead we are given a sharp-tongued loser, an angry outcast who is not so much Lennie's guardian angel as his social and emotional equal. Two strays for one; different tempers, equally hopeless futures. An interesting move.

And Mr. Jones, who is always surprising us with his range, turns in on himself, ham hands dangling over spread knees, eyes moistly rummaging through an always elusive memory. His Lennie is a true child, not a clod; easily humiliated, quick to hike up his overalls with thumbs that seem to crow his accomplishments, apt to dissolve into



tears like running candlewax. It is the kind of performance that ought to be seen by other professionals. Hard on their egos, good for their souls.

The revival did provide me with a couple of footnotes on Mr. Steinbeck's play, however—turns of fate I hadn't anticipated. The practice of casting a black man as Lennie, on first thought a fine one, does serious damage to the fourth of the play's six scenes. The scene in question takes place in a shack to which the ranch's lone black, a cripple known as Crooks, has been banished. In retaliation for his ostracism, Crooks has made a private compound of his place: no whites allowed. When a white Lennie strays into the quarters, there is an immediate and justified tension. But having a black Lennie join a black Crooks of course generates no such heat; it is an unfortunate time for the play, as constructed, to lose its spiraling momentum.

And "Of Mice and Men," long admired for its spareness, does seem desperately to need a physical environment. I've seen few plays in my life that required the scenic investitures lavished on them; most can be stripped naked and still play. But watching George and Lennie hide themselves in the underbrush on an entirely bare stage, or watching Curly's restive wife stalk in from the doorway, accents what is obvious about the work: the puppy, a girl; the necessity of killing a dog and then killing a man. The play is robbed of something of its flesh, seems more skeletonized than we had thought. The power now is in the two principal performances, and there alone.

"Where's Charley?" by Frank Loesser and George Abbott, at Circle in the Square (Uptown), "Of Mice and Men," by John Steinbeck, at the Brooks Atkinson.

## LETTERS

## Of Sherlock And the Stars

To the Editor:

With all the excitement accompanying the revival of "Sherlock Holmes" on Broadway, I must take exception to the absence of criticism of one scene in the play: to wit: Holmes taking cocaine. Holmes personifies the virtuous man, the relentless pursuit of justice and right, and the conqueror of evil. Yet, this paragon of virtue is portrayed as one who is a dope addict and must be sustained by cocaine. Why is his image being tarnished? The scene has no redeeming value and is not relevant to the plot. It has no positive message but rather one that is harmful and detrimental. For shame!

Dr. BERNARD M. ZLOTOWSKI, Rabbi

Tenafly, N.J.

Radnor, Pa.

JOHN WEISMAN

Columbia Teachers College.

Meir Zvi Ribalow is a writer and director whose first play, "The Linebacker," will be staged next month at the Moonlight Theater at Columbia Teachers College.

Who's right? Well, at the Shakespeare Festival, at the Guthrie, at the Mark Taper, at Alexander Cohen's office, they're still opening their mail.

## Where Are All the New Playwrights? Writing Plays

By MEIR ZVI RIBALOW

Probably the most longstanding lament of our theater critics and playgoers is that there are no new playwrights in America. Yet as a matter of fact, there are hundreds of them, scribbling away in rooms all across the country, and they send their manuscripts to every organization they can think of that produces new plays.

"There's no scarcity of writers—that's not the problem," observes Joel Schechter, who reads scripts for the American Place Theater in New York. "Scarcity of quality is the problem." Schechter estimates that the American Place sees about a thousand new scripts every year. Larry Mirkin, who runs the script department at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, receives around 1,200 a year. And at Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival complex, the annual figure reaches 1,500.

At the few theaters that actually produce new work, readers pore over unsolicited manuscripts, separating the hopeless rejects from the efforts that are worth serious consideration. The latter do not show up in great numbers.

Most plays arrive by mail, usually accompanied by impassioned notes or other devices intended to draw attention to the author and his work. The techniques vary. One is the blinding multicolored binder; occasionally a manuscript will virtually glow in the dark. One script arrived at the New York Shakespeare Festival with a large photograph of producer Papp on the cover, surrounded by hand-drawn stars.

Brown comments: "One of the sadnesses about American writing is a peculiar inability to write about self. We do more stuff from England at the Long Wharf because it seems more organized and whole; American plays seem imitative, or somehow unrealized."

Most, if not all, of the other readers and producers disagree emphatically. Joseph Papp holds that there are many good new American plays: he produces more than a half-dozen new plays every season. At the Guthrie, David Ball assigns part of the blame to the critics "who discourage new plays and playwrights. I hear over and over that good plays are not being written," Ball adds. "It just isn't true. It's just that no one has the facilities to produce them. Really, what producer in his right mind can afford to take a chance?"

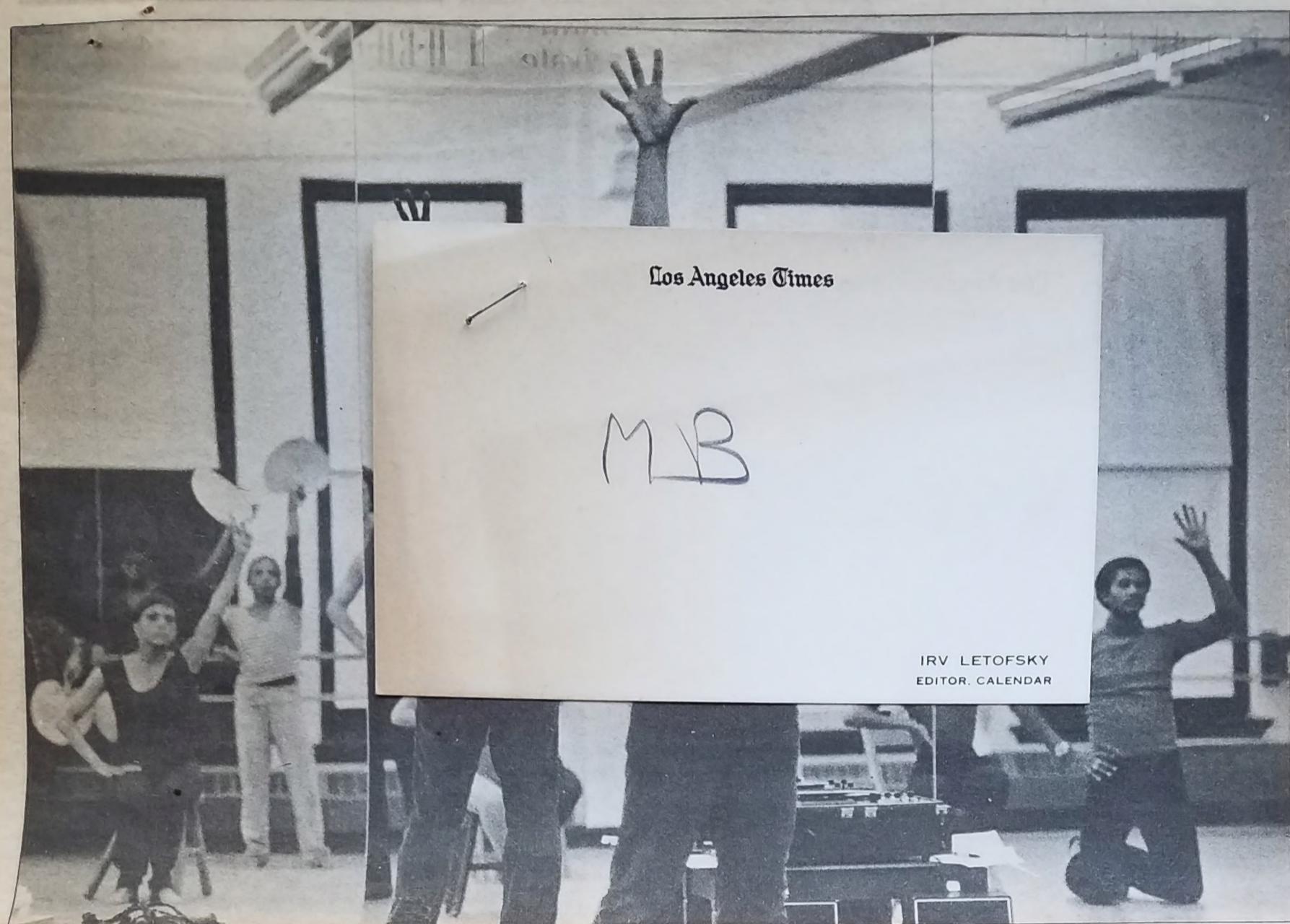
The present economic crunch has made it even more difficult for a new playwright to get his work done at some of these theaters. During the current season, for example, the Arena and the American Place are concentrating on revivals. An exception is the Long Wharf, with four new plays on its schedule; of the four, however, the only American one was written by a member of the company.

On Broadway, the chances for a new writer are even scarcer. The production offices of Harold Prince and David Merrick read only plays submitted by agents; they will not deal with unsolicited manuscripts, and they have no full-time script-readers on their staffs.

The Broadway producers all argue that the noncommercial, subsidized theater can afford to take the chances they cannot. The statistics bear them out. Papp produces 15 to 20 shows a year, and half of them original, on his 10 stages; the Taper has done 70 new plays in the past seven years.

All the readers and producers, if asked what kind of play they really look for, will reply "a good one," regardless of period or subject matter. "There are good American plays around," Ball insists. "It's just not a golden age for playwriting," observes Richard Himmelfarb of the Alexander Cohen office in gloomy counterpoint.

Who's right? Well, at the Shakespeare Festival, at the Guthrie, at the Mark Taper, at Alexander Cohen's office, they're still opening their mail.

IRV LETOFSKY  
EDITOR, CALENDAR

LOIS GREENFIELD

# An American Dilemma

## *Alvin Ailey's Hard Times*

By Zita Allen

The composite photo in newspaper ads announcing the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre's spring season bothered a few folks. Ailey's face loomed large in the background; his eyes, expressionless, stared straight ahead. Beneath him, in the foreground, a group of Ailey dancers, right arms straining upward, were frozen in a pleading posture from the opening section of *Revelations*—“I Been Buked and I Been Scorned.” In light of what had happened a few weeks before the season began, that picture seemed to say a little too much. It ran once before being replaced with another just like it—only this time Alvin Ailey was not in the picture. Ailey had selected that photo himself, and the choice was prophetic: when his company's New York season opened on May 7, for the first time in 22 years Ailey was not in the theatre. He was upstate in a psychiatric hospital.

Bracketing that picture were two incidents which made every daily paper in town and eventually convinced Ailey to undergo treatment for a condition which no one connected with his company will give you the medical term for, but which his psychiatrists say can be completely cured. On March 9, the *Times* carried a story: “Alvin Ailey Is Under Observation in Bellevue Following Altercation.” Seems Ailey caused ruckus in a dormitory near Columbia University after not being able to find his friend, a male Moroccan student. He was “charged with criminal trespass, harassment, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest.” A Police Department spokesman said charges might eventually

be dropped “since Mr. Ailey was distraught at the time of his arrest.” Then, a few weeks later, on May 1, the *Post* screeched: “Alvin Ailey Runs Amok Again.” (It didn't take too much imagination to pick up on the sly, euphemistic echo of a Richard Pryor record title.) This time, Ailey was “arrested on burglary and assault charges” after prompting a false alarm by charging up and down the hallway of his Central Park West apartment house yelling: “Fire!” He also reportedly barged into a neighbor's apartment, assaulted her, and “took a few objects.” He was taken to St. Luke's Hospital for observation. And shortly afterwards he was convinced to commit himself to a psychiatric hospital in Westchester, where he'll probably stay for three to six months.

Between these two stories, the official and unofficial talk around town ran from informed opinion underscored by sincere concern to idle gossip laced with vindictive jealousy. Gossipers kept track of Ailey's erratic behavior in the headquarters of his Dance Theatre Foundation on the eighth floor of the Minskoff Building, indulged in homophobic speculation on his sex life, made sweeping pronouncements on racism in America, and ventured reckless reevaluations of Ailey's creative genius. Official reports, supplied by company publicist Meg Gordean, focused myopically on the details of tremendous professional stress: “The school's gotten to be such a big deal. Then there's the job of running the three companies and trying to sell ballets. And being artistic director of

the first company is a job in itself. Alvin just thought he had to step in and take over in the other areas. Then there's the question of choreography and the deaths of Joyce Trisler [longtime friend and colleague] and Consuelo Atlas [a former Ailey dancer].” Meg ticked off “causes” and sounded like she could go on ad nauseam and probably had umpteen times. Occasionally, of course, the unofficial talk, in the form of innuendo and anonymous quotes, snuck into published reports, but basically their theme was blood, toil, tears, and sweat. At first, according to Gordean, Ailey's manager, Paul Szilard, was a little too talkative: “He was going into things people didn't need to know.” Now he doesn't talk to the press.

The closer you get to the center of Ailey's world, the better you understand that the intimate details of personal pressures he might have been under are anybody's guess and nobody's business: folks who say don't know and folks who know don't say. Sylvia Waters, an ex-Ailey dancer who now heads his Repertory Dance Ensemble, says simply, “You know, I really haven't heard the gossip. I haven't had time. I'm not at the moment interested. I'm not above it. I'm like everybody else, but on this score, this is somebody's life, somebody worthwhile we'd like to keep around, and either you want to contribute or you don't.” She's right. And, next to the sorry spectacle of a crowd kicking a great man when he's down, what bothers me most is the fact that far too much of the talk—official or

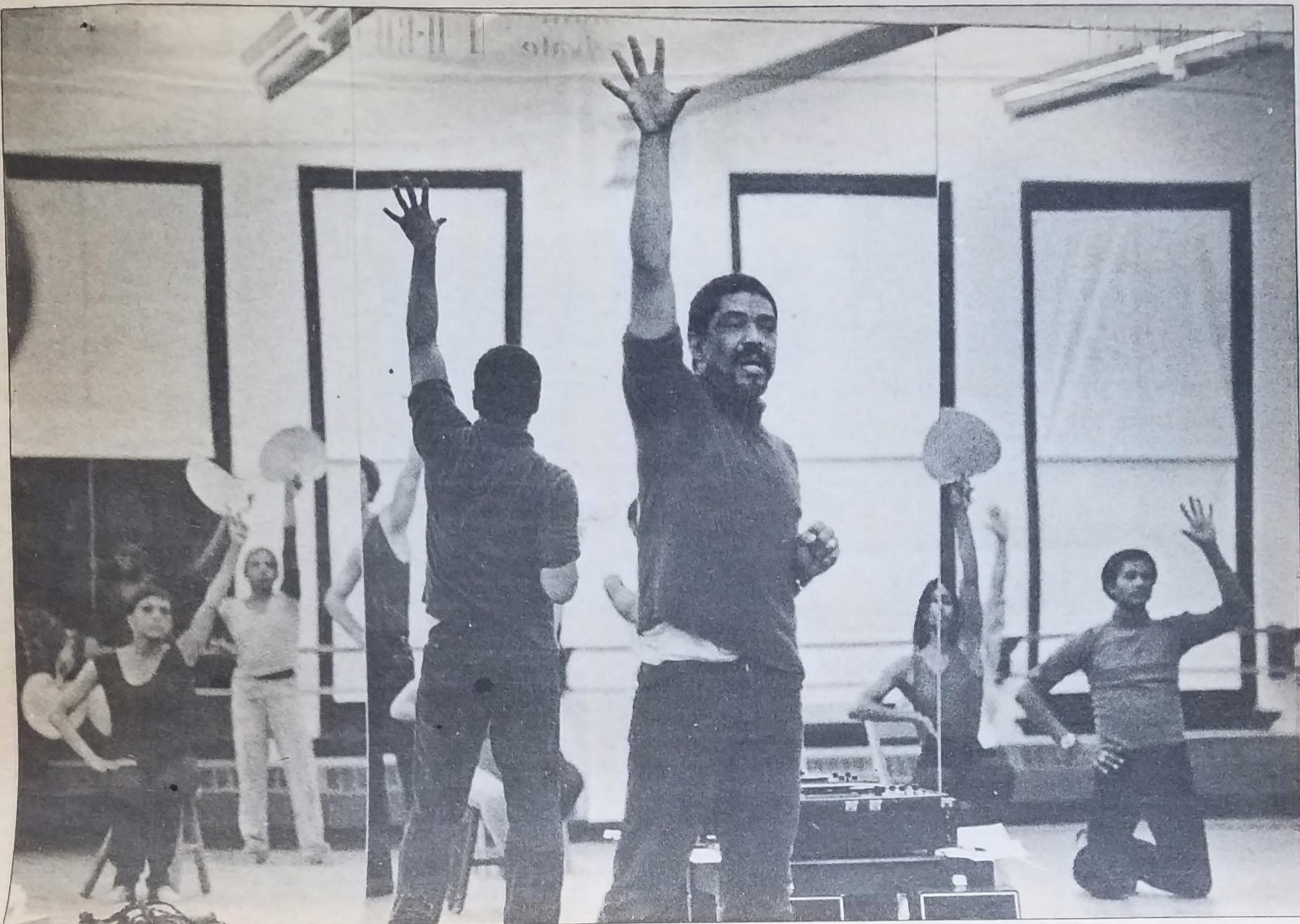
otherwise—simply misses the mark.

Everyone is in a hurry to see Ailey's dilemma as either a special case of one man's cracking under pressure or as a sign of some intrinsic flaw in his character. Hardly anyone bothers to look at the total picture. In this story of the son of itinerant cotton pickers who realizes the American Dream and finds as much racism on top of the heap as there was at the bottom of the barrel is the story of every black's battle against institutionalized racism in America. And in the story of the unending financial crisis of one of this country's most popular arts organizations is the story of the fiscal headaches of countless American artists. It's absurd to see Ailey's dilemma in True Confessions terms like the ones *People* chose: “He left his midtown apartment several years ago to move to Harlem” (as if that alone was a sure sign of trouble); “his private life moved deeper into the shadows”; “men unknown to any of Ailey's colleagues presented themselves at the box office for his seats”; “his trouble started when the Moroccan student left his apartment and moved to International House, a student residence near Columbia University.”

Instead of trying to figure out who the man was sleeping with, we should find remedies for a situation in which, after 22 years, Ailey still feels that “the company's accomplishments sometimes seem so ephemeral because it's had to constantly prove again and again to the powers that be that it's worthwhile.” We should focus

*Continued on next page*

VOICE ARTS



LOIS GREENFIELD

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The closer you get to the center of Ailey's world, the better you understand that the intimate details of personal pressures he might have been under are anybody's guess and nobody's business: folks who say don't know and folks who know don't say. Sylvia Waters, an ex-Ailey dancer who now heads his Repertory Dance Ensemble, says simply, “You know, I really haven't heard the gossip. I haven't had time. I'm not at the moment interested. I'm not above it. I'm like everybody else, but on this score, this is somebody's life, somebody worthwhile we'd like to keep around, and either you want to contribute or you don't.” She's right. And, next to the sorry spectacle of a crowd kicking a great man when he's down, what bothers me most is the fact that far too much of the talk—official or

otherwise—simply misses the mark.

Everyone is in a hurry to see Ailey's dilemma as either a special case of one man's cracking under pressure or as a sign of some intrinsic flaw in his character. Hardly anyone bothers to look at the total picture. In this story of the son of itinerant cotton pickers who realizes the American Dream and finds as much racism on top of the heap as there was at the bottom of the barrel is the story of every black's battle against institutionalized racism in America. And in the story of the unending financial crisis of one of this country's most popular arts organizations is the story of the fiscal headaches of countless American artists. It's absurd to see Ailey's dilemma in *True Confessions* terms like the ones *People* chose: “He left his midtown apartment several years ago to move to Harlem” (as if that alone was a sure sign of trouble); “his private life moved deeper into the shadows”; “men unknown to any of Ailey's colleagues presented themselves at the box office for his seats”; “his trouble started when the Moroccan student left his apartment and moved to International House, a student residence near Columbia University.”

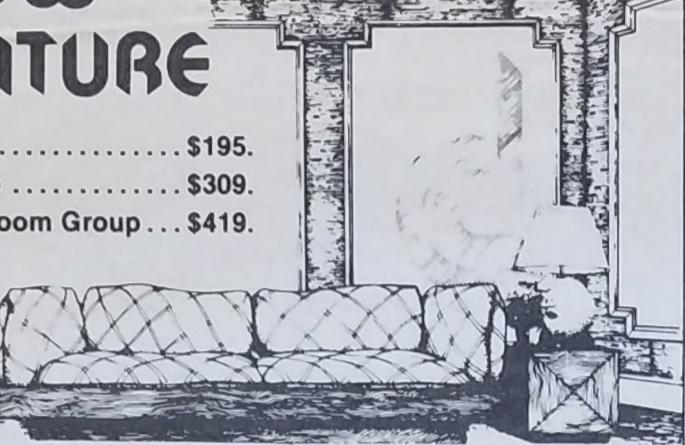
Instead of trying to figure out who the man was sleeping with, we should find remedies for a situation in which, after 22 years, Ailey still feels that “the company's accomplishments sometimes seem so ephemeral because it's had to constantly prove again and again to the powers that be that it's worthwhile.” We should focus

*Continued on next page*

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Continued from preceding page

on the fact that blacks are still systematically excluded from whole areas of the dance world. And we should figure out what undermines a man who had the guts, stamina, and smarts to shape an idea into a \$4 million institution—and still has to wonder, after two decades of struggling, "What the hell am I doing all this for?"

What Ailey has done hasn't been easy. Not only did he shape our first major modern-dance repertory company, but he has created, both in choreography and personnel, a company that more than any other accurately defines "American" as something beyond the melting pot. And, as arts administrator Harold Youngblood explains, Ailey did it without the help of a wealthy patron. "Martha Graham had that Rothschild woman. Balanchine had Lincoln Kirstein, and American Ballet Theatre had Lucia Chase. Who did Alvin have?"

The answer lies in the fact that of the Ailey company's \$4 million budget only 25 per cent is unearned. And though the bulk of that comes from government, private foundations, and corporations, a significant portion comes from the pockets of supporters who can afford no more than \$25 donations. The remaining whopping 75 per cent comes from box office receipts. In the dance world Ailey's level of public support is phenomenal. And, though it's hardly ever mentioned anymore, his company rode that groundswell of popularity, right out of the tiny 300-seat Clark Center auditorium into houses 10 times that size. What Ailey has done may not have been easy, but it sure was spectacular.

"You know for all the talk of how wonderful it is, the artist of our sort, of our kind, really is working in an unsympathetic and unsupportive atmosphere," Rod Rodgers says, explaining how he and other choreographers identify with Ailey's dilemma. "One feels that you succeed not because of, but in spite of this country's social consciousness and there is a certain amount of—I don't think alienation is the word, but there is a tremendous feeling of swimming upstream, like going against the grain. And it doesn't end. It never ends. I had hoped to be able to look at people like Alvin and begin to feel, 'Oh, there is an ending.' But it just isn't so."

When I interviewed Ailey a year ago, it was clear that he too figured it just doesn't end. He didn't look like he was going to throw in the towel, but the bouts over the years had left him frayed around the edges. The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre had celebrated its twentieth anniversary a short time before we spoke; it had come through the fire. Behind were the tenuous beginnings in '58. It had survived the '60s, when the company seesawed between luxury and poverty, enjoying the red-carpet treatment as America's cultural ambassadors on wildly successful State Department tours to Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Soviet Union and coming home to virtual bankruptcy. Things were so bad back then the company was forced to fold a couple of times. But then in '71 it jumped a major funding hurdle and got \$100,000 from the New York State Council on the Arts. City Center became its new home and invitations poured in to do guest appearances at New York State Theatre and the Kennedy Center. In two decades the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre had grown from a one-man operation into a major cultural institution. It looked as if Ailey and his company had it made. He was, after all, the first black since Katherine Dunham to have such national and international success in dance. But looks can be deceiving.

For one thing, as Ailey told me last year, "the finances never keep up with the dream. God knows it's gotten better over the years. We're probably the only black company, except for Arthur Mitchell, that can sustain dancers so they can live reasonably. But, still, I mean you must have a feeling that it's not really permanent, that at any moment something might happen, you know what I mean? Don't you have that feeling, I mean, even about us?" And success—"if you can call it that"—was something Ailey didn't dare take for

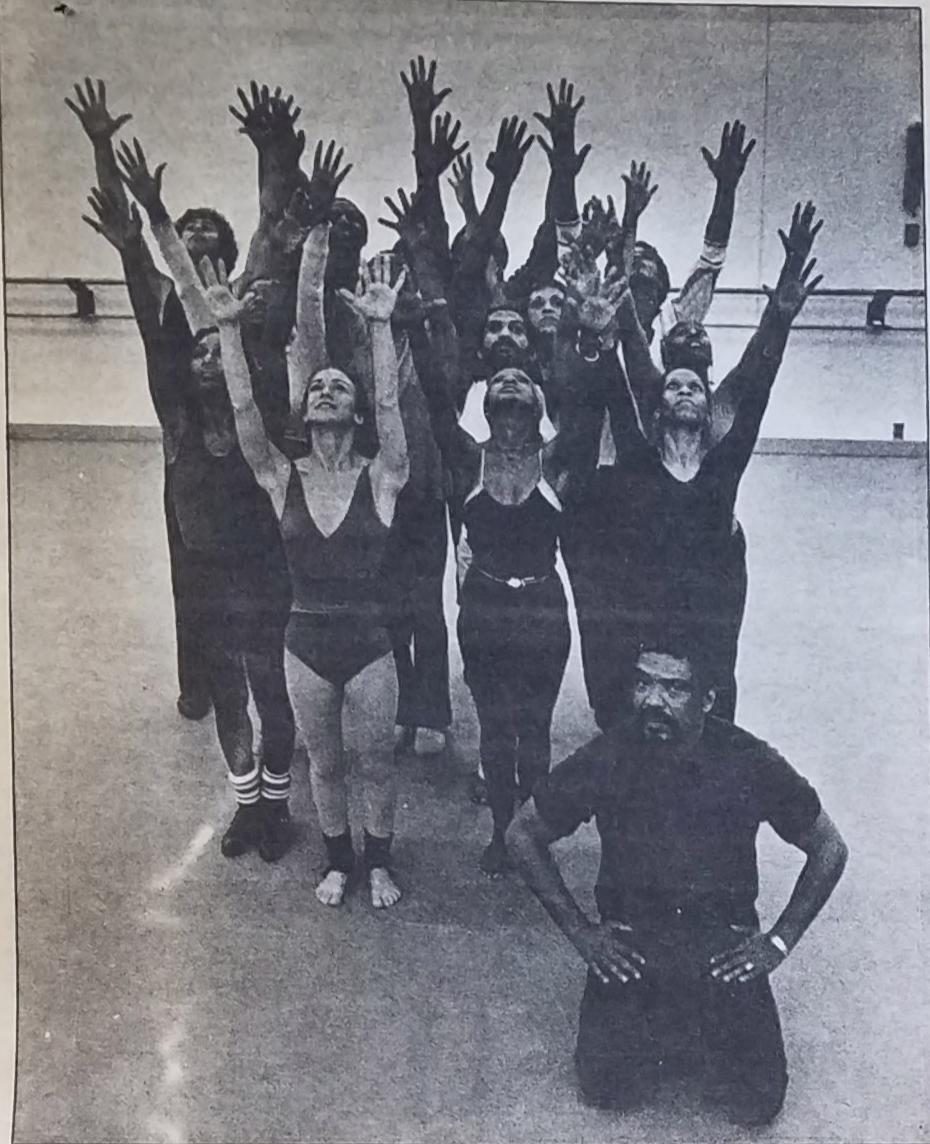
granted: "You're only as good as your last performance." When he talked about "how creative one has to be in order to live decently in this society as a black man," words like dignity and respect kept cropping up. Ailey had seen the respect his dancers received abroad transform them into totally different performers.

In an interview I did with Katherine Dunham around the same time, she echoed Ailey: "Respect for your talent and your intellect is the hardest thing for an American public to give a black person." In fact, side by side, these two interviews—views of dance from opposite ends of a 40-year spectrum—were just too similar. Taken together, their observations are a tremendous indictment of fundamental defects in American dance. Both Ailey and Dunham plunged into their role as black choreographer with a kind of missionary zeal. Dunham wanted "to take our dance out of the burlesque and make of it a dignified art." Ailey wanted "to dignify the material." Dunham complained that critics seldom took her work seriously: "You analyse the critics and there was nothing else they could say about me except that I was sultry and sexy, and that hurts." Ailey was annoyed that to some critics "anything black is considered commercial in the worst sense of the word." Ailey complained about tokenism in the arts: "You still have the old feeling that there can only be one successful black at a time and we have been kissed by the white establishment. . . ." When I asked Dunham if anything had changed in the 40 years since her career began, she said, "It's so slight that it hardly matters," and added that 40 years ago there was one company which was the major employer of black dancers—hers—and today there is still one—Ailey's.

Of course this thing isn't all black and white. Statements by various administrators who are presently with Ailey's company as well as those who've recently left seem to support Rod Rodgers' assertion that "Alvin's trauma is partly because of making the transition from an individual artist's company to a major institution where a lot of the decisions in the running of the company, and rightly so, then become the business of the board of directors, as opposed to being his own personal choice. . . . It's no longer his thing—it's too big for that—and on top of everything else, I think that's really been a blow to him. I don't think he's fully adjusted to it."

Yet it's precisely this complex structure which will allow Alvin Ailey's organization to withstand the shock of his highly publicized problems and temporary absence. A smaller company would have collapsed under the weight of such pressure. But not Ailey's. The repertory has been set for the next two years. The company is booked for the next three years. Ailey has already drawn up a tentative list of guest choreographers. And, as board chairman Stanley Plesent explains, while Ailey is, of course, responsible for the company's overall focus, he has not been consistently involved in the daily workings of either the performing company, the school, or the two additional companies. Also, there have been no unsettling changes in the administrative personnel—changes, yes, but ones Ailey has wanted made for quite some time. All key staff positions are held by people who have been with the company for at least five years. In Plesent's words, "There is continuum." During the past couple of months, however, Ailey's behavior did threaten to rock the boat.

Several people have pointed to the tug of war between artistic director and board of directors as a major cause of Ailey's frustrations. But NYSCA's Robert Mayer insists this is a universal and, at bottom, very healthy conflict. In its early years, a company's board is usually a small circle of the artistic director's friends who, Mayer says, "never ask questions of the artist." As the organization grows, "it gets so complex that a business manager or general manager is brought in and then the board starts professionalizing and asking questions." There are inevitable conflicts because "many artists don't think where the money is coming from" and the



LOIS GREENFIELD

board has to pay the bills. "You need a board that has managerial competence," Mayer says, "and you need one that has some clout to get money." And then a company gets the size of Ailey's: "Alvin can't do it all, the fund raising and everything else. He needs that strength around him and folks with enough clout to keep those dollars coming in. The board has to be able to tap the kind of money Alvin needs to do what he needs to do."

Ailey didn't always have a board. Back in '70, Ivy Clark remembers trying to convince him that one was necessary. Clark was Alvin's entire administrative staff, his strong right arm, a woman he credits with helping to "bring the company over the hump." During the seven years she worked with Ailey the company grew by leaps and bounds. She booked it into City Center the first time, secured the New York State Theatre, and wrote the proposal that landed its first large grant. She also threw herself into the holy crusade to secure the Ailey company a building of its very own. But she wasn't a trained professional arts administrator. "So, I figured if I could do all that with no experience, imagine what someone could accomplish who really knew what they were doing!"

Ailey finally bought the idea of a board, but he and Clark clashed over composition and she was eventually fired. Some folks in the dance world remember Ivy's anger so vividly that they take anything she says about the company with a grain of salt, but even they credit her with a rare understanding of Ailey and admit, as one arts administrator says, "When Ivy left, that principal buffer for Alvin to this institutional growth was missing. Much of the focus for people there, after Ivy left, was the institution and not the principal artist."

Ivy Clark clearly agrees. Two years ago she was quoted as saying, "I don't think the board stands Alvin. They can't tell his pipe from reality." When I spoke with her a few weeks ago, she had heard the stories that began to circulate after his first arrest: Ailey sweeping into offices and taking all the pictures off the walls, cleaning out desks of unwanted office personnel as a not-so-subtle hint that they were fired, directing tirades at certain board members he supposedly wasn't very fond of. Clark shook her head and echoed

her own words: "They just don't know Alvin."

Despite the tensions, Ailey told me last year that he had faith in his board. He described them as "35 people who are certainly not very wealthy but boy can they fight. Yes! And they've done a great deal to push us to get what we're after. They love the company and they love what the company stands for." And, according to NYSCA, one of the company's major funding institutions, the complex and sometimes frustrating structure is its saving grace. When asked if Ailey's dilemma will affect his company's funding, Robert Mayer replied without skipping a beat, "You mean Alvin's personal problems? No! Why should it?" Kitty Carlisle Hart says she stands behind Mayer's statement. And Beverly D'Anne, head of NYSCA's dance division, explains that as far as she's concerned, "This would not have any impact on the funding at this time." According to D'Anne, the fact that Alvin planned things so far in advance is in his favor. "Of course," she adds, "the entire decision is not up to me, but I'm positive that the panel will not look at that organization any differently than if Alvin was there. Not this year. If it's next year, that's a different story."

It's already a different story from the one printed in the *Times*, the *Post*, and *People* magazine. Ailey's situation is a reflection of what it means to be black in white America, a reflection of the burden shouldered by the heads of our country's artistic institutions, a reflection of the overwhelming pressures artistic genius must endure to survive in this country. It's actually a lot like the ad that got pulled. Ailey looms in the background, larger than life. In the foreground, instead of a group of dancers, there are blacks and artists, buked and scorned, reaching for a slice of an ever-diminishing pie. There are no simple solutions to the problems which contributed to Ailey's dilemma, contributed so greatly that it's our dilemma as well as his.

Alvin Ailey, and others like him, deserve tremendous consideration, attention and gratitude. Ailey has devoted his life to the extraordinarily difficult task of "creating something where there was nothing before" and, as he once said, "it all happens at great personal sacrifice."

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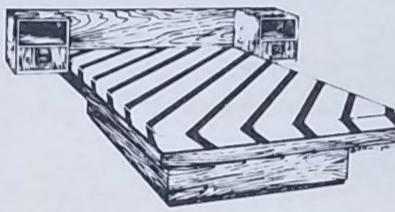
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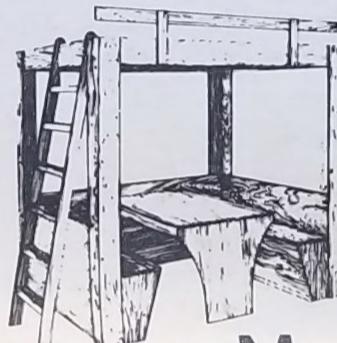
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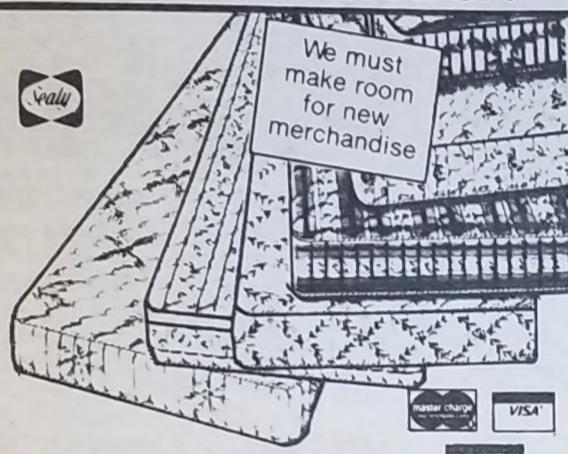
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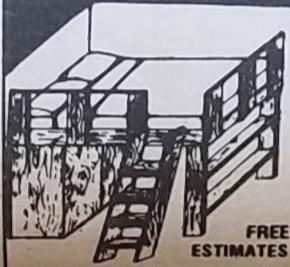
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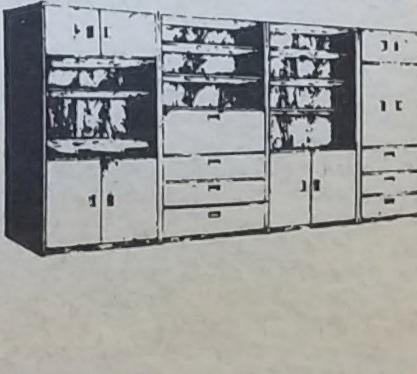
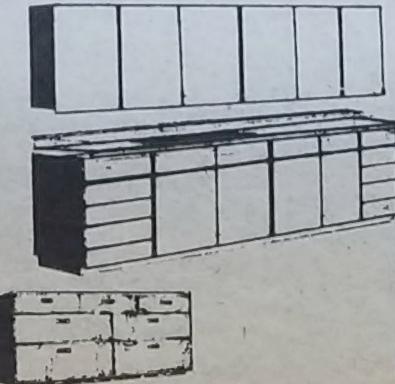
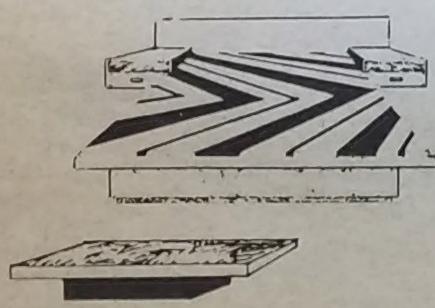
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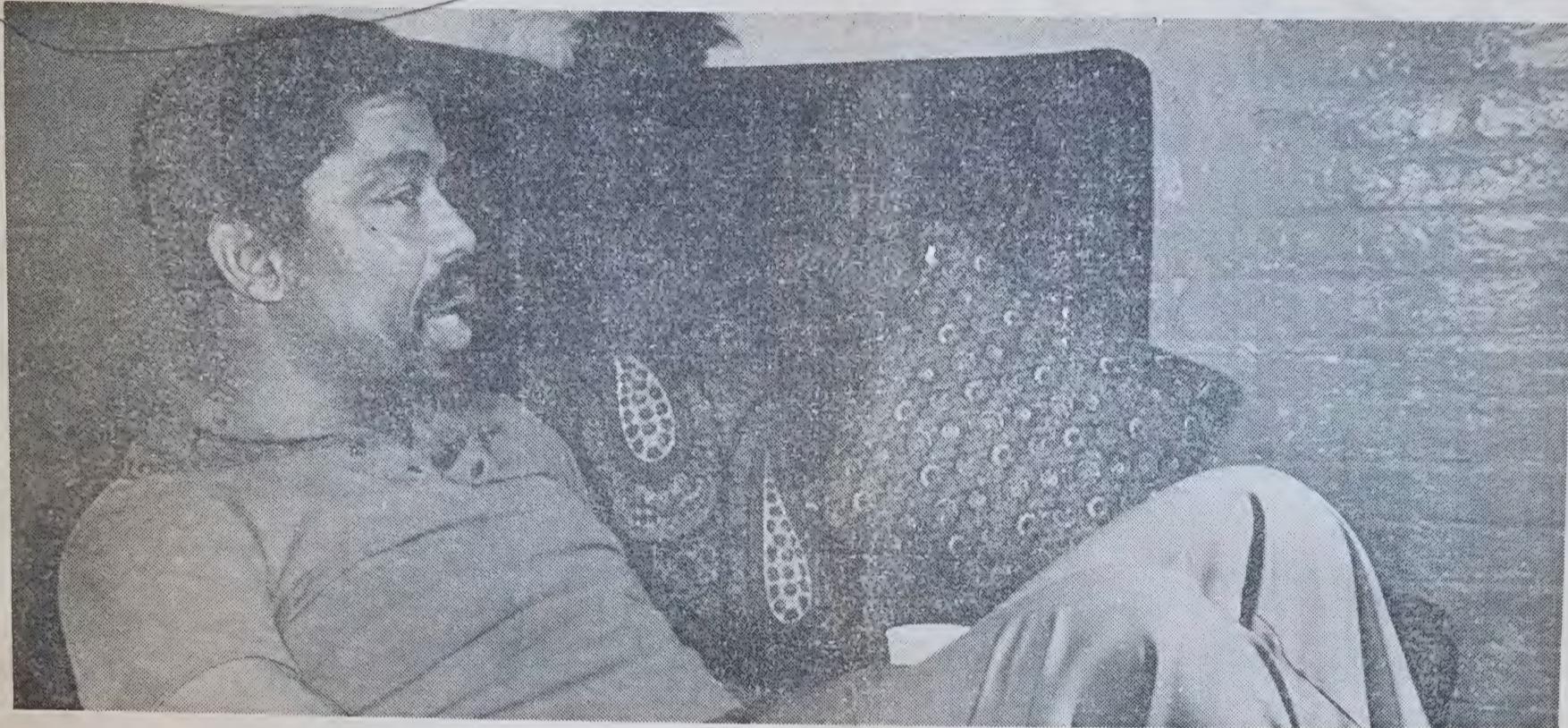
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# Alvin Ailey's company draws the world



By Ken Sandler

**A**LVIN Ailey, his American Dance Theater, and about 20 former dancers with the troupe—some who have gone on to great things elsewhere, and some, as Ailey put it, "who deserted to Europe or Hollywood"—will be on stage at Manhattan's City Center Wednesday night to celebrate the company's 20th anniversary.

Will Ailey himself, now 47, and retired from dancing, perform any of his own works as he had anticipated earlier this year? "Nooooo! No man, not unless I lose 150 pounds" by curtain time. But he will be on the stage, "probably announcing something, and helping to carry some of the former dancers [who will perform] off."

Sitting in his office the other day, he reminisced about some of the hard times and speculated rhetorically: "I don't know if I will ever choreograph again. Sometimes I think, 'God, Jesus Christ, I don't ever want to do this again.' It's the hardest thing I ever tried to do in my life."

He is the person who has done what no one else—black or white—has done before: He made modern dance truly popular. Other modern dance companies sometimes draw part of the dance crowd; Ailey draws the world.

The Ailey troupe does land-office business at the box office of City Center—the 3,000-seat theater where his company plays six weeks a year. No other modern dance ensemble in memory has been able to pack them in the way Ailey does. And it is an integrated audience—full of whites, but with hundreds of blacks on many nights.

Still, times are changing, and Ailey's new choreographic efforts for the company are nonexistent. He will offer nothing new this season, or in the spring, but may do a new ballet next fall. He says the burden of running a large dance organization—his main dance company, a junior troupe, a student troupe, and his school where some 5,000 students take lessons each year—is too heavy to allow the luxury of frequent creation. (It is a problem that another major dance company founder-director-choreographer, Robert Joffrey, has complained about. Joffrey has not choreographed a new ballet in the last five years. He, like Ailey, finds the workload of artistic direction and administration to be overwhelming.)

"I go through periods where I feel enormously creative, and periods where I don't," Ailey said. "Some of the time you have to do it on schedule—the grant applications are made last year for [next year], so I have to decide, well, I'm

going to do this ballet next October. But by the time the rehearsal period comes around, I don't feel like doing it any more, so I don't."

"Then, other times, when I feel like I really must do this right this moment, the company is on tour or we're involved in something else. So the fact that the company has become so structured has, in a way, become a hindrance. There isn't the freedom to do whatever I feel like doing."

"The question is, where does all this leave one as a person, as a human being, as a man—and if one really has any feeling of accomplishment about it. I feel that it is all very ephemeral, that every time we're out on the stage we're starting again. It has to be constantly proven again and again to the powers that be that we are worthwhile."

"And I don't know whether that's the product of the inherent racism in the society, or my own personal feeling, but I feel it very strongly. I also feel that all of this takes place at a kind of an enormous personal sacrifice. It is something that is all-engrossing and it keeps me in a stage of turmoil all the time."

Ailey hopes there will be major changes in the next few years—longer New York seasons, shorter tours, the enlargement of the troupe, and the generation of new choreographers of quality from within the company.

"The thing that is so bothersome to us now is the constant touring. It takes an enormous toll on the dancers physically and emotionally. We'd like to become one of those companies that just does major cities—with live music. That would be my dream if there is one dream that is more present than [any other]—to cut down from 22 weeks [per year] of touring to maybe 14-to-16 weeks to major cities, with the kind of productions we do in New York. Now, we can't take any ballets with scenery on our tours [to most cities] because of all the extra stagehands we'd need . . . We're still looking at the budget constantly."

"I'm trying to become a museum of classical American modern dance works that should be seen—things by Ted Shawn, Jose Limon, Katherine Dunham . . . ;" a direction which seems more and more to be the company's major thrust.

Ailey wants his troupe "to become a kind of national modern dance company, and to establish the idea that modern dance can function in the same way as the classical ballet, as far as repertoire is concerned . . ."

"Blues Suite" and "Revelations," Ailey's two most famous works, are both being performed during the three-week season that begins Wednesday. Those two ballets were to be segments of a full-evening, semi-narrative work

that Ailey never completed. "It was to be a tribute to the black experience. There were to be sections dealing with Kansas City and Chicago jazz, and the whole migration North, and to bring us up to the present." A third segment, "Been Here and Gone," was finished, "but it never quite worked . . . and [then] I kind of lost interest in the project."

In early performances of "Blues Suite," the dancers sang—"Careless Love," "Going to Chicago," and other songs. In other early Ailey works, the dancers spoke. No more. "I was intending at the beginning to move toward a kind of new field that would involve singing, dancing and acting, with dance as the primary thing." It never really got going.

"I always wanted to be a popular company and never wanted to become elitist . . . I wanted a large audience, and I was aware that the kind of music presented to the public [must be] alive . . ."

If "Revelations," with its gospel music, moved the feet and the hands, then "Blues Suite," moved the heart. "Blues Suite" still works, but is there perhaps something missing from it these days?

"Yeah," Ailey confirmed. "I detect that too. If there is an Ailey style it's epitomized by 'Blues' and 'Revelations'—a kind of an earth hugging, slinking . . . I think that's probably been watered down a little bit by the total dancer concept," the fact that Ailey's dancers today are more fully trained in all aspects of dance.

"In the early days, the dancers were not quite so technical. They were much more personalities than they were technical wizards."

"I mean I chose people for 'Blues' and 'Revelations' who were funky characters . . . Nowadays, one of the things we pride the company on is how many different styles it can work in. That's been both good and bad because it deprives them of one style, one cohesive style. Now they have to do Butler and Beatty and Sappington and all of these [other choreographers] works at the same time, and not just Ailey stuff."

"With 'Blues' . . . the understanding is not [always] there . . . we're trying to get that back."

Ailey did his first choreography at a Lester Horton workshop in the West Coast in 1953, came to New York and got a job as a Broadway-show dancer.

"I had always wanted to have my own dance company and to be a choreographer. I was always more interested in being a choreographer than in being a dancer, so once I had the security of a job—in 'Jamaica,' with Lena Horne, I and a

—Continued on next page

Ken Sandler is a freelance writer whose specialty is dance subjects.

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Part II/24

## Alvin Ailey troupe draws the world

-Continued

friend of mine decided we would give a concert—which was all the rage in those days.

"You pulled together a group of people that you knew—as many of the dancers in the show who were interested, dancers I had seen at other concerts, and people I had seen in classes. You costumed it yourself, and you gave a program at the [92nd Street] YMHA on a Sunday afternoon. So that's what we did. I made two ballets for the program—one of which was 'Blues Suite,' which was something that had been lurking in my head since my Texas days" as a depression-era child of itinerant cotton pickers. The friend was Ernest Parham, "who has become a pop singer now," and that was the beginning.

"I didn't see except from one concert to the next. In 1958, I didn't really have a vision of touring the world or having a school or of being part of the culture of the country."

"And it has never, ever become secure in a financial way and I don't think it ever will. But the fact of some kind of permanence started to happen around 1968-1969."

"I started to be able to pay rehearsal salaries, for example. It was no longer just a group of people who would come and [rehearse] for you for 12 hours a day for six weeks and give one performance and not get paid."

"Around that time I started to see that it really could continue, that I'd be able to provide enough work for people to [allow] them some sort of dignified living and also to provide some artistic continuity for the ballets."

"The debilitating thing about a company at its beginning is to create ballets which you have to constantly remake with new people because you're not able to keep your dancers together economically."

"I still worry about it every day. I wake up sometimes and say, 'What the hell am I doing this for?' It's so complex, so demanding, that you really have to have a lot of drive to keep at it all the time and not let the problems get you down, but that's such an old story."

"I think you have to be such an autocrat to run a company these days, which I still am not enough of. It mostly has to do with protection—protecting yourself from people, protecting yourself from your feelings, protecting yourself from your sensitivity. I think most successful choreographers build an enormous wall through which the dancers cannot come. I don't believe in that."

So where is Ailey's head now? "Out in spaaaaace," he replied in a falsetto voice that broke into a deep, growling, hearty laugh.

Ailey of course will choreograph again. But what and when? "Probably not until next October, and I don't know what . . . I have lots of ideas—I always keep lots of music around that I might want to seize upon when the moment is at hand. I have a lot of Janacek and Bach that I want to choreograph, and scores that young composers are sending me all the time."

Any more blues or gospel ballets? "No. I'm not particularly interested in that. 'Revelations' hangs over my head like a sword. But having established a concept that I want to leave the audience 'up,' we're therefore always looking for 'up' ballets. Everybody keeps saying, 'When are you going to make another 'Revelations'?'—and I keep saying, 'Listen, that was 20 years ago, I don't feel like that any more.' I've moved on to other spheres, other kinds of music, other themes. I've become interested again in theater pieces, in kind of a broadening, in going beyond dance as an expression. I've wanted to do a theater piece with some well-known actors and singers. That is pretty close to my heart."

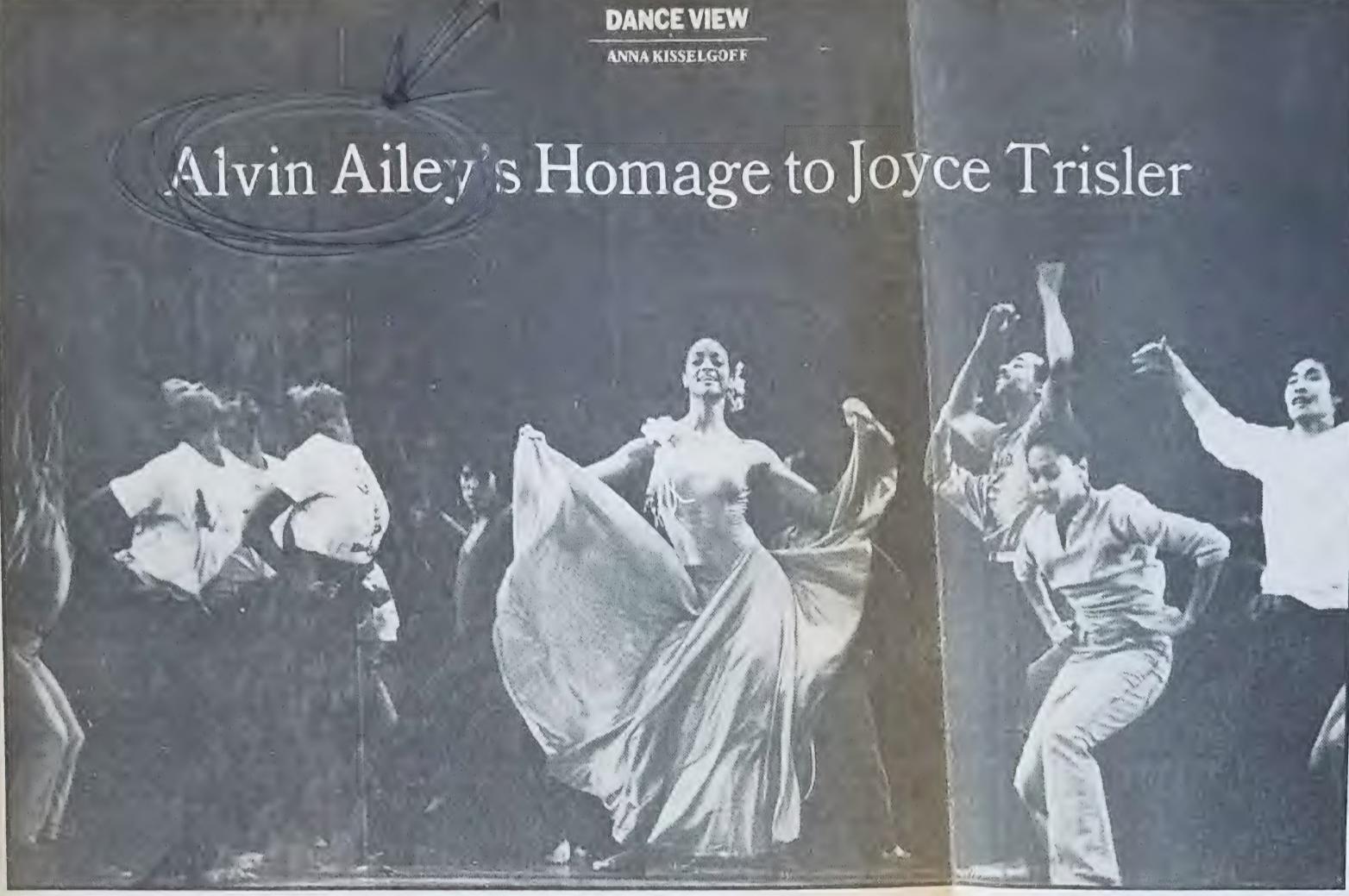
"I make pieces about people and with people . . . I'm kind of moving more into an area that is a little more lyric theater than it is ballet. I [did] a kind of conceptual ballet, a disco ballet, in Israel, aimed at getting the younger people into the theater. I guess my head is kind of everywhere." //

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DANCE VIEW  
ANNA KISSELGOFF

## Alvin Ailey's Homage to Joyce Trisler



Donna Wood, center, leads a dance in "Memoria," Alvin Ailey's tribute to a friend and colleague who died in October.

Lois Greenfield

**W**rite about what you know," young writers are told. Choreographers have had more difficulty taking the same lesson to heart. This is not because they are bereft of words but because they are untrammeled by words. The temptation is to strike out in new directions, to create a new vocabulary or to use an old one in different ways. The great legends of the world beckon for reinterpretation, the universal themes lend themselves to restatement. Similarly, experiment or rebellion in dance is not always personal; it becomes a general manifesto against a previous esthetic.

Yet it reveals, as Alvin Ailey has just shown in his latest premiere, a tribute to the late Joyce Trisler, that a choreographer's best work is frequently his most personal. In "Memoria," Mr. Ailey pays homage to a close friend and longtime associate. Miss Trisler, who died recently at the age of 45, was, like Mr. Ailey, a member of the Lester Horton Dance Theater in Los Angeles. She danced with the Ailey company, and although she also worked independently of it her works have been part of the Ailey repertory.

A public choreographic tribute to a close friend is al-

ways a risky emotional and artistic undertaking. Very obviously, it can be more meaningful to its creator than to the audience. Yet while "Memoria" is a *pièce d'occasion* — a noble one — Mr. Ailey has paid Miss Trisler the fine tribute of creating a work that has a universal quality. It is a dance of both exultation and quiet but deep feeling.

Like José Limón's tribute to Doris Humphrey (Miss Trisler was her assistant at the Juilliard Dance Theater) in "Choreographic Offering," the new "Memoria" contains quotations from the honored figure's own choreography and dancing. The central female figure is a symbolic reference to Miss Trisler and she wears the white dress, corsage and flower in her hair identified with Miss Trisler in one of her own performances. At the end when she is held aloft by a massed group of dancers, the same image is reproduced by the dancer in a red dress.

The leading role has been danced this season by Donna Wood and then by Maxine Sherman, who is the dancer I saw. It is not, then, a role molded upon one current dancer's specific qualities but upon the qualities of the dancer whom it extols. Yet "Memoria" also incorporates references to Miss Trisler's professional life. In the final moments, the more

abstract figures — dancers in tights — are joined by young people in jeans, the students with whom Miss Trisler, one of the city's best teachers, worked and fashioned into young dancers.

It is hardly likely that the broad public is aware of all these references. Its warm reception of the work is indicative rather of the success Mr. Ailey has had in generalizing them. "Memoria" is divided into two parts called "In Memory — In Celebration." The theme is communicated very clearly. The elegiac portion has a lyrical tone in which the Trisler figure has two male attendants while the small ensemble echoes her own movements. The celebratory section speaks of joy and rebirth. It skirts the danger of beatifying its subject, but its choreographic design triumphs over any possible sentimentality. In this section, Mr. Ailey fills the stage with more dancers than he has ever used. The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is supplemented by two junior groups — the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble and the American Dance Center Workshop from the Ailey

DO NOT FORGET THE NEEDIEST!

school. But they are not used here as extras. The inclusion of the two youthful groups is integral to the concept of renewal and the idea of Miss Trisler's work with young dancers.

Keith Jarrett's music, also popular with the young, is utilized with dramatic purpose. Its hallucinatory tone suits the dreamlike structure of the first section in which the central figure seems to swim, as if in water, amid reflections of herself. The signature motifs for the woman are amplified in the choreography for the ensemble. There is the off-balance arabesque twisted into a position à la seconde, or the tilted body with a leg extension held forward. The woman runs among the dancers, harkens and is encircled by them in a flower-like cluster. The movement alludes also to the Horton technique. She rotates her torso and goes down to the floor. The ensemble re-enters in chiffon tops and the main figure dances a supportive duet with another woman before Mr. Ailey places her into a fleeting quotation from his own duet, "Fix Me Jesus," from "Revelations." The choreography is repeated with three couples doing the same movement at different times. This wave-like ebbing flow subsides. The woman, seemingly at peace, walks to the back and to the side of the stage.

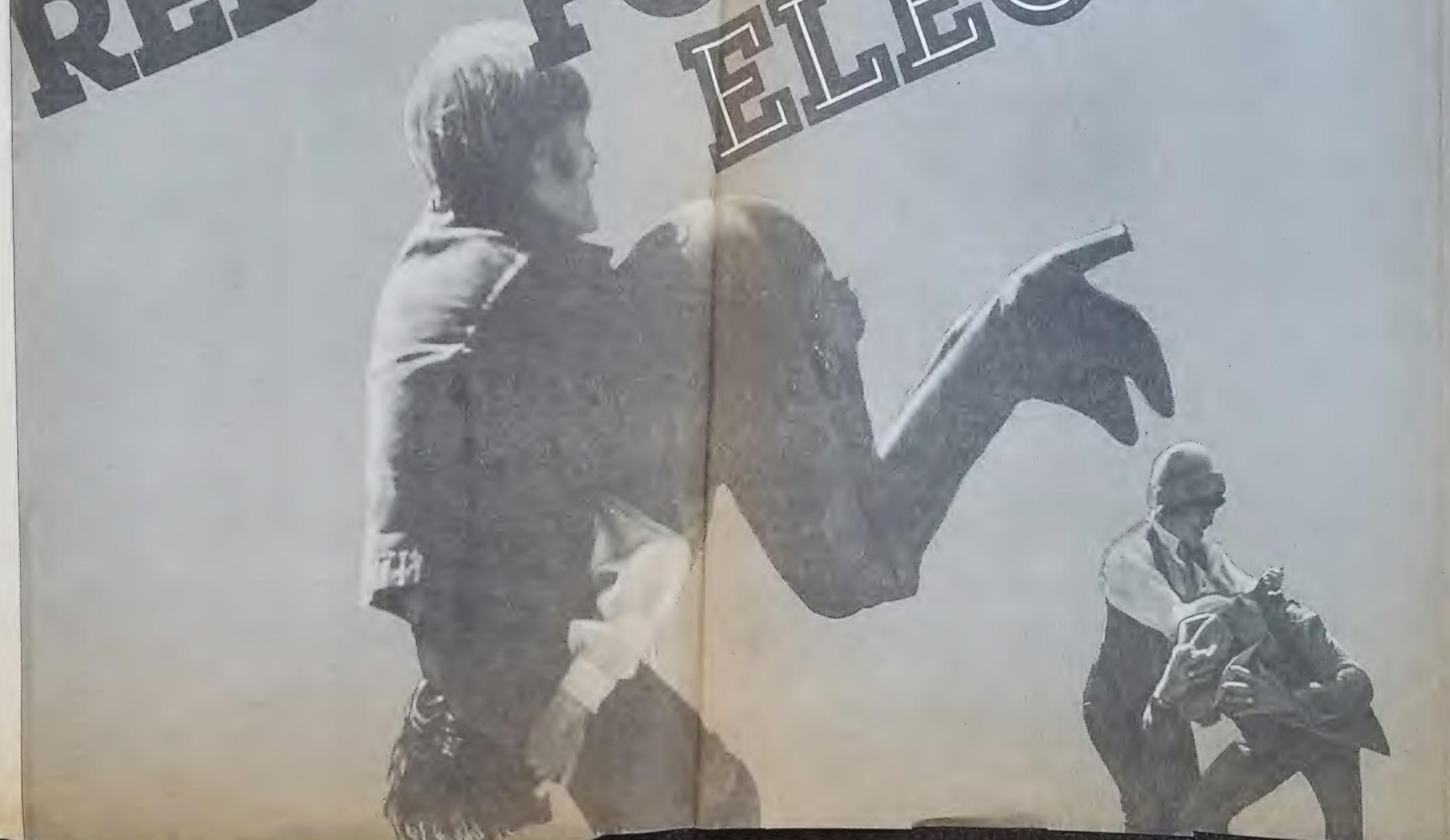
Following this intensely private homage, Mr. Ailey assembles his three groups of dancers for a more public celebratory section. The senior group, in tights, is flanked by two younger groups, forming chains and friezes. The solemnity gives way to a tighter style until the woman enters, this time in red. The music is jazzier, the idiom more percussive. The dancers whirl, the leg extensions become kicks. The students in jeans merge into the joyful celebration. "Memoria" becomes a huge sculptural mass, recalling perhaps Mr. Horton's own mass spectacles at the Hollywood Bowl but also moving into its own emotional crescendo. When the woman is raised aloft, her arms in steeple formation, she is standing on a human base. These mass groupings are more reminiscent of mural art and modern-dance of the 1930's and 40's than relevant to our own time. Possibly, they could have been too much here, but in "Memoria," sincerity has carried the day. In a program note, Mr. Ailey declares, "This work is dedicated to the joy...the beauty...the creativity...and the wild spirit of my friend Joyce Trisler."

During this current Ailey season at the City Center, another longtime Ailey associate from the Horton period and the early years of the Ailey company has appeared as a guest, dancing in John Butler's "Portrait of Billie." Carmen de Lavallade reminds us again how a fabulous dancer can also be a fabulous actress. She gives the title role the strength of emotion — especially pent-up rage — that somehow even the fine young Ailey dancers in it have never quite attained.

To some extent, Miss de Lavallade owns this role. It was created for her and when she dances, the characterization is never separated from any single step or gesture.

Unlike "Memoria," "Portrait of Billie" is a tribute to an artist taken at a distance. The subject is the life and loves of Billie Holiday but the piece is more of a social statement than personal one. The theme is public success, private tragedy. The core of the work, one of Mr. Butler's best, is made up of combative duets between Billie and her man. Ulysses Dove, always good in the male role, is inspired to give a fresh live-wire performance by Miss de Lavallade's magnificent power. Like a cat about to pounce, she embodies tension in stillness. It is when she does not strike her man but raises her arm to do so, that one feels the blow.

# REDFORD FONDA ELECTRIC



DANCE NEWS, JUNE 1971

## Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Tina Croll

**THE ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER**  
N.Y. City Center  
April 27-May 9

by Walter Sorell

If anyone would wake me in the middle of the night to find out which of the many dance companies I have seen this season has made the strongest kinetic impact on me and fared rather well in all theatrical and choreographic aspects, I would say without hesitation: The Alvin Ailey Company.

It presented a balanced program during its spring season of well-tested repertory pieces and three new works. Most performances offered as final number *Revelations*, a classic among the new enduring dances in the modern dance repertory. One never tires of seeing it. It is not only varied in pace, theme, and imagery, it has its tragic and humorous moments. The company is so well trained and moves with such rousing spirit that the alternating cast often passed unnoticed — the greatest compliment for an ensemble.

As a matter of fact, this properly integrated company was a pure joy to behold. These black and white dancers moved beautifully in what I would call the Alvin Ailey style, jazz at the core of the dancers' hearts, modern in their expressionistic way, with a balletic glaze for good measure. Whatever is needed by a certain theme becomes more pronounced.

Speaking of the older pieces of

Ailey's guest choreographers, it must be underlined that Lucas Hoving's *Icarus*, a difficult work because of its intricacies hidden behind simplicity, is done better here than I have ever seen it danced by the choreographer's own company. Joyce Trisler's *Dance For Six* is a brilliant dance for the mere sake of dancing, meticulously constructed, with one movement leading to the next in stunning patterns, poetic with a bit of gentle humor. It received a spectacular rendering when I saw it with Dudley Williams, a star in an ensemble of little stars.

The range of Ailey's choreography always surprises me. One could not imagine two more different works than *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* and *Flowers*. In the former he is a skillful painter of moods, evoking impressive images of remembrances of the past, telling, without spelling anything out, touching, without being sentimental. The more often I see it, the more I am convinced that it is one of those works which the choreographer felt impelled to do. It came from deep within. Not so *Flowers* which seemed to have been a challenge coming from outside, an idea he had to find for his Royal Ballet guest artist, Lynn Seymour, somewhat inspired by the death of Janis Joplin. It is a dramatic bravura piece, often on the verge of kitsch and always saved by the sheer power of the dancing. Undoubtedly, it will remain in the repertory and continue to fascinate Ailey's female dancers as it proved to do in the case of Constance Atlas, Linda Kent, and Rosamund Lynn who

all cannot help but bring a touch of their personalities to this part.

One of Ailey's reliable dancers, Kelvin Rotardier, presented a work of his own choreography, *Child of the Earth*, with the theme about the flight of the oppressed and the experience of creating a new life. The dance images pictured the honest and intense feelings of flight and anxiety, love and hope, they were all there and very well executed by the choreographer and Miss Atlas. Perhaps because the movements were too legible, not abstracted enough or did not find the expression of a bigger dimension, the work never took off on its imaginative flight. Also, the score of Hugh Masekela, probably a source of inspiration, overpowered the choreographic concept.

Alvin Ailey's two new works are worlds apart. *Choral Dances* to the music of Benjamin Britten is Ailey's *Missa Brevis* and, in fact, it is carried by a deeply felt religious and ceremonious feeling like José Limón's work. But the comparison ends with their spiritual kinship, since their approach and choreography are different in structure and tone. Ailey's piece does not try to penetrate the universal calamities of man, it is far more a ritual. Limón's observer becomes a conjurer who, excellently danced by Rotardier, has healing and conciliatory powers. The basic concept seems to be one of homage to man and the mysterious forces guiding him. In coming seasons this work may prove to be more forceful than it was in its first performances.

If this work did not strike one as a masterpiece — even though it may once be a counterpart to *Revelations* — there was no doubt in anyone's mind that his solo, *Cry*, created for Judith Jamison, is as perfect as anything can be. Its three parts create a dramatic and lyric mood which transcends its obvious pictorial connotations of showing a black woman in different phases of being. It is not militant at all, but so penetratingly human that its cry is unforgettable. It is unforgettable because it is artistically irrefutable.

Choreography and performance can hardly be separated. The work was sculptured on Miss Jamison's very distinct looking figure, and she added to it the expression of her personality which appears on stage imperious and withdrawn, goddesslike and humble. In the first section she seemed to be all woman, enduring pain and giving strength and joy. The specific color of her skin became clear in the second part when the challenge of the environmental space around her grew. Anguish finally turned into defiance and defiance into a fighting flame, proud of its power.

The strength of this simply staged solo, covering limited space, lies in the drama within the dancing figure created with a surprising economy of movement; it lies in the unpredictability of the movement sequences, in their explosive quality due to the self-imposed limitations.

And to think that this company was — only a couple of years — at the brink of financial disaster and dissolution . . .

**NATIONAL . . .**  
(continued from page 5)  
he may have been technically more exciting by jumping higher and turning faster, he projected fewer dramatic nuances than Sibratt.

### Fonteyn

The National Ballet gave more than 50 performances in Washington since last October during weekend performance series. As guest artist during October, Margot Fonteyn danced the title role in Stevenson's full-length *Cinderella*. However fine her dramatic interpretation and her perfect placement and line in adagio, Fonteyn's revisions to the choreography in her solos — both in the ballroom and by the fireside — did not enhance the production, which otherwise missed the hand of its creator (who fortunately is now co-director of the Company). Stevenson's choreography has definite movement motifs (or themes) which carry the reality versus fantasy contrasts and parallels in the production, and until he came back and set the ballet right again (represented by a magnificent performance in late March by Miss Burr and Mr. Fuente), these motifs were blurred over by the dancers. They simply failed to emphasize, either rhythmically (quantitatively) or qualitatively, the many thematic movements — and unfortunately New York saw the ballet in this less-than-perfect shape.

**RICK . . .**  
(continued from page 13)  
ditional folk song sung by Belina); Chassid, of ecstatic belief; Kadish, of ritual mourning; and Zion, of hopeful work. Mr. Rick had his audience's attention with him throughout — smiling, dreaming, believing, dying, living, hoping. His dances are pure and intense and reflect his personal integrity and sensitivity.

Mr. Rick who hails from Chicago and studied not only ballet but also worked with Mary Wigman, Rosalia Chladek and Dore Hoyer (whom he partnered) expanded the idea that dance is a valid form of communication capturing universals of humanity through personal statement. He combined mime and technical excellence with a personal view that inspires and reflects one's emotionally creative core.

**TINA CROLL AND DANCE COMPANY**  
Washington Square Methodist Church April 27, 28, May 2

by Frances Alen

Tina Croll's visions are essentially private, introvert in nature, surrounded by silence. She favors the veiled, the elusive and the ambiguous metaphor.

Her movement vocabulary makes use of springy floor covering jumps, contrasted with low-slung, weighty, surrendering-to-gravity walks, her neck, shoulders and arms ultra relaxed. She also likes to do controlled inward turns in place on one plié-ing leg, and sinking, very soft, undulating movements of torso, arms, and shoulders.

All of this was evident in the three works shown in the WBAI Free Music Store Series, which typically displayed her aesthetic.

*Groundwork* evoked thoughts about earth, tides, the forces of gravity, weights and measures. It was all there in the narration, which, in a matter-of-fact, flat tone of voice informed us about earthquakes, tidal waves, jungles, etc. The movement hardly ever presented images coincident with the narrated images, but it seemed to be about energy flow and the pull of forces. There was one slow rolling section on the floor which suggested the action of ebbing tides.

A variety of space covering games were played, like skipping, jumping and the rolling. And there was a nice moment which broke the generally consistent energy level at which the piece was kept when Miss Croll, a long measuring rod balanced on her head, transforming her into a compass, turned in place, then abruptly walked through a paper panel, tearing it.

The dancers entered in *Farm* carrying clothing which they placed in a pile, then wore interchangeably. Again, characteristic movement games took place, much of it looking like random activity done with the seriousness of children at play. Actions were mirrored, faces stretched from smiles into grimaces, and the sound track of farm noises helped create the mood of ceaseless, monotonous, going-on-morning-noon-and-night-forever way of life.

A new solo, *The Limestone Room* seemed a very personal act of catharsis. Wearing a fur stole, a roller skate on one foot, she skinned around the floor carrying a load in a table cloth. Then, scattering the whole with a clanking noise, she slowly, agonizingly rolled over assorted cutlery and plastic cups and plates which now covered the ground. As she rolled, she squashed, making crackling sounds. A convulsive no-saying gesture of the head was accompanied by a piercing, pained wail. It gave me goosebumps. And it summed up the repressed rage, protest, depression, tantrum.

An inherent hazard in Croll's method is the fragility of lines of communication between audience and performer. When the essence and intensity of her vision are successfully communicated, a rarefied, delicate, shared experience can take place. When, for whatever reason, channels get blocked, the sense of communion, so necessary and satisfying, is impeded, cutting off access to her ideas. In this case, I think the dark sanctum of the church did not do her justice.

Performing with Miss Croll were Barbara Ensley, Micki Goodman, Ted Striggle, Toni Lacativa and John Moore.

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## Reviews: Nassif, Morgan-Maxwell & Rose

### ANNA NASSIF

With Charles Weidman Theatre  
Dance Company  
Expression of Two Arts Theatre  
New York City  
April 17

by Walter Sorell

Charles Weidman introduced Anna Nassif and the work she showed with the words that she combines magic with madness. Even though this was said with an impish smile he seemed to believe what he said and during the course of the evening one could not help believing that what he said was so.

Charles Weidman's studio stage offers only a very small dance area, perhaps the smallest in town, but at times there were nine dancers and a narrator on stage, with several people in front of the few seats projecting slides onto both sidewalls and the rear-wall while running a tape. It was all mad and, though this madness had little method, the whole production had a disarming charm. It somehow worked while being impossible. The reason for it is simple. There is some theatre magic in Anna Nassif.

The program consisted of *Four Theatre Pieces* and, after the intermission, of five episodes of a *Choreographic Epic Theatre Piece*, *A Mythological Construction*. The *Four Theatre Pieces* began with a *Dancing Figure Performing Two Roles, One Mythical*

and *The Real* in which live dancing (Karen Cowan) was juxtaposed to film dancing (Elizabeth Walton Leblanc). The costumes which extended the arms with huge pipes had a strange medieval look, the pipes were skillfully manipulated around the body, later the dancers crept around it. As so often happens with multi-media experiments, the filmed dancing was more interesting than its live counterpart.

In *Absurd Dance for Soloist, Group, Sculpture and Dresses* music accompanied a reader of poetry while four girls moved incoherently with and against the soloist (Ruth Waldman, a fine dancer). Everyone was doing his own thing, and everything seemed sufficiently absurd.

This was followed by *Ecology in the Forest*, a wild montage of tape collage, whispered poetry, black and white photography and motion picture. The dance was performed by Barbara Petersmeyer and, in spite of the confusing visual and aural elements trying to drown me as much as they did the read poems, I liked it.

*Composition for One Figure in Many Places and Spaces* was the one piece which did not work for me at all — or was I already numbed by so much tape collage, projections, voices and dancing? The weakness of muchness became obvious in this piece, the humor was too precious, movements repetitious, mime turned

into mugging, and the pictures did not seem to be well integrated.

The final work was, indeed, a *Choreographic Epic Theatre Piece* (with Brechtian overtones), *A Mythological Construction*, if there ever was one, a super-multi-media piece with enough choreographic ideas for at least an entire evening of dances. There was so much going on that my mind only saved a few stunning images, as the praying dancers in El-Greco-style, two girls forming a cathedral, some Spanish dance movements by Anna Nassif, the danced cries from Picasso's Guernica, Garcia Lorca's poetry read in the original while the tape collage accompanied the many still projections and the dancers from the University of Wisconsin Dance Repertory Theatre who were joined by two dancers from the Charles Weidman Theatre Dance Company. All this was presented in five episodes, overwhelming and frightening in its richness.

I have never seen before such wealth of imagination wasted, such fantastic fantasy run amuck. If Anna Nassif could only relax, select and edit properly, if she would only learn to economize and realize that in hauling down the heavens one can so easily lose sight of the beauty of the blue sky! Is no one going to the Midwest to save a talented choreographer from drowning in her own talent?

*Triptych* (choreography, Morgan) started male... men huddled in uneasy, conclave, beleaguered, vulnerable, scanning the dark. Individual forays into space were fear-filled. Their strength lay in the group, and the group's strengths were visual as well as psychic. The huddle configurations which Morgan constructed were like pieces of African sculpture... solid, plastic forms with open surfaces, that had the look of hewn and polished wood.

Part II was a female coming-of-age solo for Maxwell, a testing of self and place... tentative at first, finally secure. In Part III Morgan and Ryland Jordan neatly danced a high stepping, rhythmically accented duet, with elegant walks and fluid torso follow-throughs, reminiscent of a Watusi Lion Dance.

"In a landscape of 20 snowy mountains the only thing moving was the eye of a blackbird".... Clyde Morgan spoke the line, setting a mood-drenched atmosphere for a languid, very romantic, sweet and quiet but exultant love duet by Morgan and Maxwell, with music by Chili Walker. The basically bland dance material was stretched too thin over too long a time, but because it was all so unpretentiously personal and did seem to be about real feelings it had an appeal.

The entire company, dancers and musicians, was splendid, performing with energy and involvement.

through varieties of field and track games by his white coach, (danced with great charm and freshness by Carla Maxwell) he is confronted, in his moment of triumph, with ominous, challenging, dashiki-clad figures, calling him to his heritage. The athletic contest he has endured seems mild compared with the emotion-fraught confrontation they bring.

Stripped, he travels in the bush, encountering dangers, also love. An enchanting duet with a dancer named Saluka is wrought with innocent, primal and total sensuality. Saluka has the awkward grace of a young long-legged animal and so similar is the structure of their two-bodies that they seem like echoes of each other in the flesh — two parts of one entity, soberly and exquisitely coupling.

In the end he integrates his various selves — symbolized now by the masked, hooded, ceremonially dressed figures who surround him — each of whom he acknowledges with a ritualized gesture; a gesture first performed in the dance by an awesome God-figure. It was powerful stuff, (though a bit too long) and it overshadowed a lot of what went on earlier.

Although Carla Maxwell is white, Black consciousness pervaded the program. Even *Function*, choreographed by her, was a West African derived ritual of exorcism, with Maxwell as the possessed, and her frail figure trembling in convulsed seizures.

The pieces indicate that Miss Rose is not quite aware that in choreographing for her own independent company she must create dances that will exist on their own, as separate and complete artistic entities. Each of the pieces in the concert might have been pleasant enough as a brief and not very weighty dance interlude in some musical comedy, but could not stand as autonomous dances.

*Spread A Little Joy Around*, the concert's opener, used movement that was simply too big to ever

reach completion. The dancers seemed to flail around, all arms and legs with nowhere to go. They romped about in a manner too childish to be fresh, frequently repeating senseless and uninteresting motifs.

Not truly a dance, *Diversions* was a string of more or less pantomimed oneliners. Pat Kornhauser, Erick Hodges, and Steven Van Pelt ran through the jokes unconvincingly; perhaps they were insufficiently rehearsed.

(Continued on page 20)

A kind of immunity that leads to jail

## The new grand jury

By Paul Cowan

Salvatore (Sam) Giancana is a Chicago man who, in the opinion of some Federal law enforcement officials, used to be a leading figure in organized crime. He would not appear to have much in common with Sue Sussman, a young Oberlin graduate who volunteered a few years back to work on a committee in support of Father Philip Berrigan and his co-defendants in the "Harrisburg Seven" case.

But the two share an important experience. Both have been subpoenaed by Federal grand juries in the past few years, and their cases reveal the unsettling new ways in which the juries, which were traditionally regarded as shields for defendants, have become prosecutors' tools. In Giancana's case, a grand jury was used to harass and imprison a suspected criminal whom the Government knew it might have trouble convicting in open court. In Sue Sussman's case, a jury was used (unsuccessfully, it turned out) to pressure a reluctant citizen to yield information the Justice Department's lawyers wanted—perhaps to obtain an indictment in a specific case, perhaps just to build up domestic intelligence files.

By exploring the relationship of cases of people like Sam Giancana to those of people like Sue Sussman, one can learn much about the ambiguities—and misuses—of justice in this wounded, uncertain society. For the grand jury emerged as a powerful Federal prosecutor's tool in the mid-sixties as part of a universally accepted Government effort to crack down on organized crime. But by the turn of the decade the strategies and tactics developed in the war on the drug trade, loan-sharking and union racketeering were being used in far more controversial grand-jury proceedings with political overtones—those involving political and social activists, for example. And most recently, the juries have become an important tool of prosecutors who want to pressure academics or journalists to reveal their sources. Thus, civil libertarians have begun to condemn the juries as a Government tool for suppressing dissent. In a speech last March 13, Senator Edward Kennedy criticized "the use of 'political' grand juries by the present Administration." He described their use by some Federal prosecutors as "the second coming of Joe McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee."

Paul Cowan, a freelance writer, is co-author of "State Secrets," to be published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston this fall.

The Giancana case opened up crucial new ground for Federal prosecutors. In 1965 two assistant U.S. attorneys in Chicago, Sam Betar and David Schippers, were trying to break up the organized crime outfit they believed to be Giancana's. When they convened the grand jury they—and their quarry—thought the panel would play its traditional role of subpoenaing peripheral witnesses in order to amass enough information to indict more prominent suspects. If they subpoenaed someone of Giancana's stature, he'd surely invoke the Fifth Amendment and refuse to testify, they thought. As a rule, such people weren't given immunity from prosecution, since the point of the investigation was to indict them. The two attorneys were stumped.

But after brain-storming for a couple of weeks, they came up with a relatively novel way of trapping Giancana. They would get him court-ordered immunity, but then they'd jail him for contempt of court when he refused to testify (as he'd be likely to, in order to preserve his credentials with the rest of his colleagues). That device had been used in state courts—Alfred Scotti, Manhattan's Chief Assistant District Attorney, estimates that he's obtained more than 100 contempt citations in the past 20 years. And in a few nineteen-fifties national security cases, witnesses—like former Government employee Ludwig Ullman—were jailed for refusing to cooperate with the juries. But their punishment was incidental to the Government's case. Giancana's was part of a planned strategy. Betar and Schippers, and Nicholas DeB. Katzenbach, who was Attorney General at the time, agree that the tactic had never been used in a major Federal case. In Katzenbach's mind, there was still a principled distinction between granting a witness immunity to encourage him to testify, and using immunity as a device to imprison people who were certain not to talk. The Giancana case occupied a novel middle ground. Nevertheless, after much thought, he decided that it fell into the first category, not the second. (In some political cases, he thinks, immunity may fall into the second category.)

Still, the use of immunity "was such a new technique that other law-enforcement people treated us as if we were freaks at first," says Betar, who is now in private criminal practice in Chicago. "We realized that we'd better do our homework on Giancana, in case he decided to bluff us out by testifying to some lies. So we took six months surveilling him, putting things together."

The device worked well, Betar says. "Giancana went to prison. And jailing him created a state of chaos and fear in the minds of his associates. At first, they had thought we were just trying to grab some headlines with the grand jury. But once the

lesser lights learned that we'd found a way to put the head of the whole show in jail, they didn't know how to cope." One of them decided to testify, lied and was cited for perjury. Others talked and produced information that led to indictments and convictions of several important mob figures.

Giancana remained in jail for a year, until the grand jury disbanded. Then, Betar and Schippers and their superior, U.S. Attorney Edward Hanrahan, tried to bring him before the next panel to imprison him for its full session—18 months. But Ramsey Clark, who had replaced Katzenbach as Attorney General, vetoed the idea. "I just couldn't accept the method of coercing testimony," he said when interviewed later.

Giancana left town for Cuernavaca, where he still lives. Meanwhile, Betar and Schippers had spotlighted an effective new tool for law-enforcement officials. "I don't want to brag," Betar says, "but I know we laid the groundwork for the way immunity provisions have been used in the past few years."

The tool remained unused until Richard Nixon's election as President. Then the Justice Department, under John Mitchell, devised what came to be known as the 1970 Organized Crime Control Act, whose first two titles expanded the powers of Federal grand juries. Title I empowered the Justice Department to convene special investigative grand juries that would last for 18 months and could be reconvened for 18 more. And Title II allowed prosecutors to go beyond the all-encompassing "transactional immunity" that Betar and Schippers had granted Sam Giancana. "Transactional immunity" would have provided sufficient legal basis to imprison any witness who refused to testify. But now, for the first time, the law also provided for a narrower "use immunity" which could, in certain instances, allow witnesses to be indicted for the substantive crimes the grand jury was investigating.

Traditionally, lawmakers and the courts had adhered to a strict construction of the Fifth Amendment in cases involving grand-jury witnesses. When Sam Giancana was granted "transactional immunity," he was assured that he'd never become a defendant in the case about which he was testifying. For this reason, such immunity had traditionally been granted with utmost caution; the fear was that powerful criminals might be able to get corrupt prosecutors to grant them such immunity, thus insulating themselves from the law. "Use immunity" solved that problem. U.S. Attorneys rarely have to lobby with Justice Department officials to grant a key witness immunity as Betar and Schippers did. But "use immunity" also affords

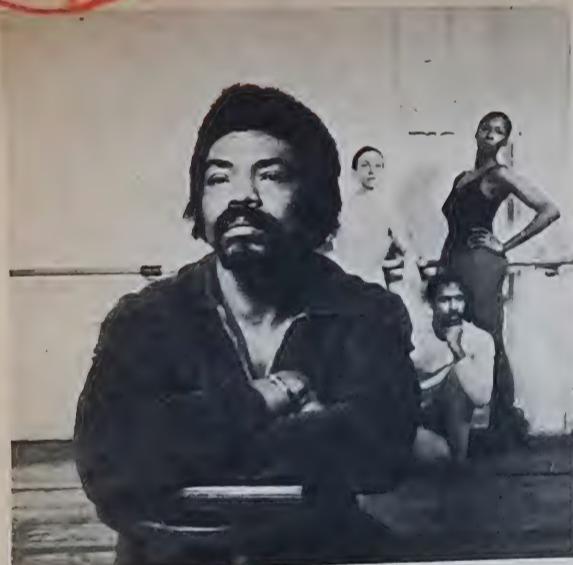
(Continued on Page 34)

JACK MITCHELL  
iley in  
mison.



Modern dance is getting hot

## Alvin Ailey, arsonist



By Ellen Cohn

"AILEY IS COMING"—Poster in the window of a Jackson, Mich., barbershop.

Modern dance—the loves of Isadora notwithstanding—has never been hot. True, companies have drawn critical accolades and cheers, but the cheers have come from the refined throats of adherents, and never from vox populi. Since the nineteen-thirties, modern dance has been an Art Form identified with drafty lofts and lofty themes—yearning and torment on a metaphysical plane—brought down to earth by occasional heavy-footed, if high-minded, cries of social concern—yearning and torment on an earthly plane.

The late drama critic Stark Young, an early admirer of Martha Graham, nevertheless once said of her work, "I'm always afraid that Martha's going to give birth to a cube on stage." And this deadly image of pain in pursuit of, to say the least, a rather curious pleasure has clung to modern dance as closely as brand-new tights. Small wonder then, the audience remained a hard-core coterie.

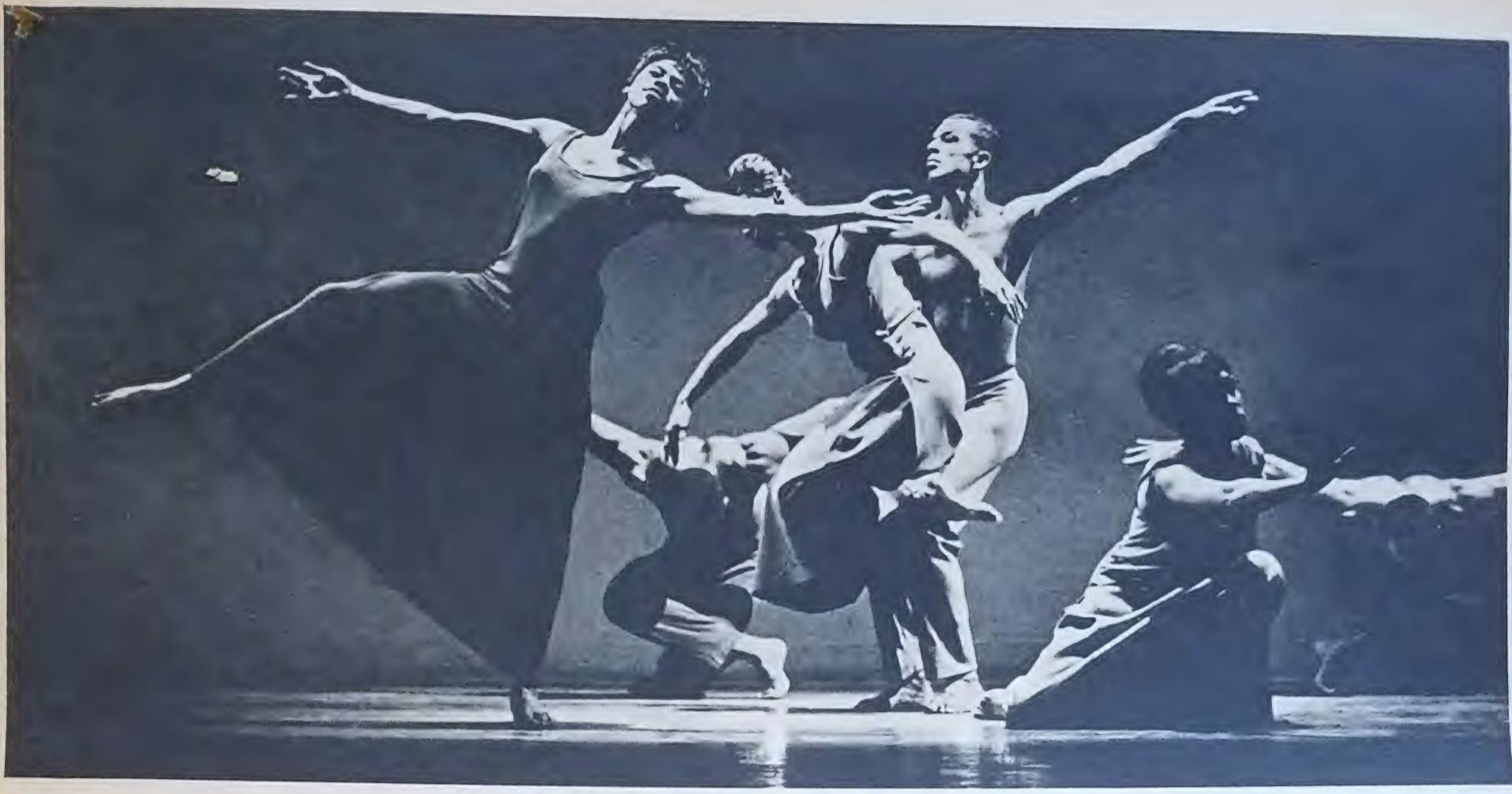
Alvin Ailey has been changing all that. In November, 1970, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater—the first modern-dance company to perform in the Soviet Union—ended a six-week tour in Lenin-

grad with the audience chanting, "Thank you, thank you, thank you" during a 23-minute ovation. A year later, in New York City—where the public can choose from several modern-dance companies in any week—the Ailey company scored the largest advance sale of any modern-dance attraction at City Center, then topped that figure the following spring.

In April, 1972, Anna Kisselgoff wrote of "rumors" coming from Ailey performances that "dance could be painless, stirring and fun." Reporting about "audiences on the edge of genteel frenzy," she certified the rumors as fact. Last August, the renamed Alvin Ailey City Center Dance Theater joined the New York City Ballet and the City Center Joffrey Ballet as dance constituents of the City Center of Music & Drama, Inc. Modern dance is getting hot.

In the past two years, in addition to eight new works for his own company, Ailey has choreographed "Mingus Dances" for the City Center Joffrey Ballet; a long ballet for the world premiere of Virgil Thomson's opera "Lord Byron"; the dances for Leonard Bernstein's "Mass"; "Shaken Angels" for the New York Dance Festival; "Sea-Change" for American Ballet Theater; and the dances for the Metropolitan's new production of "Carmen." Last summer he traveled to Hamburg and to Winston-Salem, N. C., to supervise new productions of his works; and to Cedar Crest College and Princeton University to receive honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degrees. In February, he directed and choreographed "Four Saints in Three Acts" for the "Min-

Ellen Cohn is a freelance writer and critic.



Met"; flew to Stockholm to stage a work for the Culberg Ballet; and began work on two new ballets for his company's season that begins May 8. Alvin Ailey is hot.

**O**NE of the life-giving experiences in contemporary dance and theater"—that's how an unnamed English critic (quoted by Clive Barnes) described a recent Ailey season. Barnes himself had previously applauded the company for providing "art and entertainment"—a double-header that many would assume is the beau ideal but some modern-dance devotees believe to be as esthetically unsound as a two-headed dog.

Marcia B. Siegel, writing at the time of Barnes's own comments, spoke out for "dance purists" and accused the Ailey company of a "kind of commercialism that cannot be justified. Under [the dancers'] electric spell," her indictment ran, "audiences forget to ask whether they are contemporary, relevant, profound or even honest." Her piece appeared under the title "Selling Soul"—a barb Ailey cannot forget, and one that still makes him wince.

"The black pieces we do that come from blues, spirituals and gospels are part of what I am," he says. "They are as honest and truthful as we can make them. I'm interested in putting something on stage that will have a very wide appeal without being condescending; that will reach an audience and make it part of the dance; that will get everybody into the theater. . . . What do people mean (Continued on Page 23)

Scenes from "Revelations," the Ailey masterpiece, his company's signature work. Facing page, Ailey in a rehearsal studio with two of his group's best-known dancers: Dudley Williams and Judith Jamison.

JACK MITCHELL



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(Continued from Page 21)

when they say we're 'Broadway'? If it's art and entertainment—thank God, that's what I want to be."

"There's been a tendency to keep modern dance something precious," says Walter Terry, who has been writing about dance for more than 35 years, "as if popularity were not quite pure. But Shakespeare and Sophocles were the popular theater of their day. The Rockettes are just as good as Martha Graham, only different. 'Broadway' should be a great compliment. Alvin's highly theatrical style is having an impact on modern-dance choreography that naturally attracts more people. And if he is remolding the classical ballet vocabulary to suit his temperament and ideas, that's only right. It's what Tudor, De Mille and, especially, Robbins have done."

**U**p five flights of stairs at 229 East 59th Street, on the top floor of the red brick building that is headquarters for the Alvin Ailey City Center Dance Theater and its school, the American Dance Center, Alvin Ailey leans over his desk, exhausted, and rests his head in his hands. In brown velour trousers newly ripped in rehearsal, a rumpled red velour V-neck shirt, a thick clip-on brass bracelet at each wrist, he is at once frayed and oddly elegant.

Even slumped back in his chair, Ailey is imposing, an aristocratic figure, peering out at the world from narrow eyes in a massive proudly held head. Voluble, a gifted raconteur and mimic, his rich, musical voice slides in and out of accents with ease. He laughs often and with great gusto, delighting in show business anecdotes—from an exchange between oversized temperaments during "Antony and Cleopatra" rehearsals at the Met, to the unexpected dust storm at "Dude" that drove a choking audience into the streets, to psyching out official escorts during the Russian tour.

Yet Ailey carefully controls how much he reveals about himself. Though flattered that his recent sizable weight loss is noted, he dismisses a passing question about the number of pounds in the same hasty way he turns aside questions about his professional fees — "That's gossip!" Even a query about

a particular piece of music may be met with a grieved look and stony silence.

"He tried to get inside my head," Ailey says of a well-known interviewer, suddenly pressing his hands to his temples as if preventing a fissure. "I let him come to my apartment," he continues in a gritty mixture of anger and sorrow most people reserve for recounting a mugging.

Ailey was then living on the far west reaches of 46th Street; he has recently moved to a three-and-a-half-room apartment on upper Central Park West which he shares with a mutt named Chester and two Burmese cats. The 14th-floor apartment has terraces on three sides. "I always wanted to live high up," he says, laughing at himself.

Alvin Ailey (rhymes with "daily") was born in Rogers, Tex., a small town 50 miles south of Waco, in 1931. "I have deep memories of the situation there . . . sharecropping, picking cotton, people being lynched, all the black men having been to prison, segregated schools, movie theaters where I had to sit in the balcony. . . . The times were different then. It was pre-Martin Luther King; pre-freedom marches and sit-ins; pre-the protest movement. I don't remember my people being bitter or it being discussed at home. It was simply the way it was."

The way it was included Sunday School and the Baptist Young People's Union; gospel meetings with Holy Rollers; sneaking out at night to see the midnight rambles that were "not to be seen by children"; hurling stones at cottonmouth snakes and copperheads; and the "funky" people at the Dew Drop Inn on Saturday night where there was barbecue and Nehi soda and everyone came and danced.

Ailey lived in Texas until he was 12, when his mother moved to Los Angeles to work for Lockheed. "She had two jobs. She also worked on the other side of town cleaning people's houses . . . but I didn't realize that till later."

It is out of the Texas experience, his "blood memories," that Ailey's two most popular and critically praised works have come: "Blues Suite" (1958), and "Revelations" (1960). Both use traditional Negro music.

"Revelations" is the Ailey masterpiece; the company's

only two ballets that can be termed political: "Min- qualified success. As 101

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signature work. To dance linguists, it reveals his early interest and ability in employing a broad dance vocabulary. Graham contractions, Horton arms, the arabesque of classical ballet, jazz and ethnic elements all meet easily here with Ailey's own invention.

The first of the three main sections in "Revelations" opens with a community of nine dancers dressed simply in earth colors gathered together in an amber light, gently swaying in unison, arms upstretched, palms open, reaching for surcease. The group breaks apart briefly, drawing together again for shared strength — the arms shooting up like fresh stalks, the hands recalling flowers, petals opening in the sun. The section closes with "Fix Me Jesus," a tender *pas de deux* where faith in the healing love of Jesus is reflected in the female's trust for her male partner. She is slightly tenuous at first, testing him, perhaps, then finally secure. He is wholly responsive to her, attentive yet unstudied, notably gentle. The intensity of the emotional commitment between the two — on a human rather than a heroic scale — is riveting.

The second or "white" section (so called for the costumes) features a jubilant baptism ("Wading in the Water") and Ailey's most stunning use of props — stylized white branches; a large white umbrella so full of itself that the canopy overflows and floats with abandon unevenly past its hinged ribs; and two stretches of fabric, turquoise and white, that fill the stage with waves of water (a simple but splendid *coup de théâtre*). This section ends with "I Want to Be

Ready," a solo for male dancer that begins with a slow catlike stretch on the ground, unwinding a seamless ribbon of movement that is performed in a compact space, with utmost precision, and as if on one breath.

Almost the entire third section, "Move, Members, Move," is a rousing, though preacherless, revival meeting attended by eight couples in sunlit costumes who finally rock the house with "Rock-a My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham."

As soon as the curtain falls, as if in reflex action, audiences rise up shouting. "Anyone who doesn't like 'Revelations' should be shut up and put away," Walter Terry remarked recently. Most critics would agree. No matter what their quibbles or disappointments with Ailey's other works, nearly all continue to heap praise upon this work. (Actually, Ailey's notices are generally excellent but the paucity of space given to dance criticism on the whole assures that lesser pieces will go unreported.)

But in a minority opinion, Marcia B. Siegel has written, "I used to think this beautiful, moving suite of spirituals was choreographically perfect. Now, without actually changing many of the steps, Ailey has turned it into an escalating thrill trip, a build-up to the screaming, jumping ovation.... At the finale six people used to be able to lift the audience out of its seats for endless curtain calls — now Ailey has 16 doing it.... One can see an evolution toward a more theatrical, vivid experience... [has] moved the dance further away from where it was meant to be."

"How do they know what was in my head when I first



Ailey and Carmen de Lavallade in 1962. Eight years earlier, the two had left the Lester Horton company in Los Angeles, coming to Broadway to be leading dancers in a musical.

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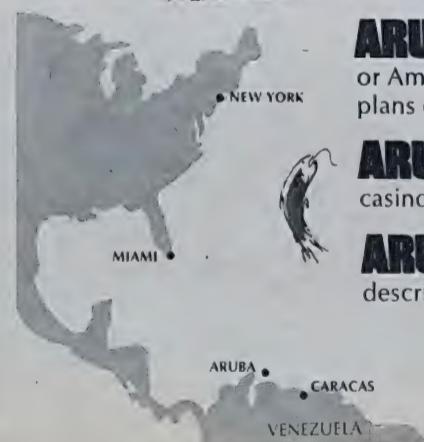
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'Then, in April of 1970, Ailey held up the State Department.'

made that piece?" Ailey groans. "How do they know how many dancers I wanted to use?"

**T**HE work of the women and men who make dances is the most ephemeral art we know. Painting and sculpture are permanent testimony. Scripts and scores are on hand when actors, musicians, singers, directors and conductors begin their work. But dances exist *en l'air*. Although two systems of dance notation exist, they are not widely used.

Most revivals are reconstructed by rumor. If the choreographer is unavailable, those who have danced the piece, or dressed it, or lit it, or have seen it many times are the fallible trustees. Photographs are extremely helpful; films are as rare as "old snow." Sometimes even hearsay evidence is admissible.

Even the creation of a new dance is somewhat evanescent. For "Love Songs," a long solo for Dudley Williams, Ailey began work at home listening to the music, "A Song for You," "A Field of Poppies" and "He Ain't Heavy," breaking it down into sections and phrases, noting the counts in a hardcover composition book, a kind familiar to every school child.

That same child, wandering into the rehearsal studio during the following weeks, might conclude that the two grown men there are playing an eccentric form of Follow the Leader. Ailey, in his velour pants and striped cotton shirt, facing the long mirrors, is gliding across the floor, reaching, falling, turning . . . counting aloud: "1 2, 3, 4" . . . seemingly carving the shape of the dance out of the studio space. Behind him, Williams, barefoot, in striped pullover and knit jersey pants, is duplicating Ailey's movements. As the patterns transfer to his body there are subtle changes, refinements, a natural process that precedes dramatic interpretation, as the dancer's own body structure and particular strengths alter the image, the impact of the choreographer's design. Later, Ailey, watching from a stool, arms folded across his

chest, head tilted up, eyes squinting through the smoke of his constant cigarette, may pick up on Williams's instinctual response to a phrase and incorporate it into the piece.

Satisfied with a sequence, Ailey turns on the tape recorder and now the two men execute the steps with the music, both counting as they go. Sometimes the counts don't fit and Ailey will rethink the counts and the accents with his body; then he'll scribble a new series of numbers in his book. Apart from a hurried sketch of a rectangle with a diagonal line in it—Ailey's reminder to himself that he wants a certain series to move diagonally across the stage—the notebook offers no direct visual clue to the choreography. It might be the book of a child struggling with arithmetic. Columns of numbers are never tallied. The sum will be seen on stage.

**I**n any field, insiders believe in the unique eccentricities common to those in their line of work. Opera singers, boxing referees, brain surgeons, waiters—each could furnish proof that his occupation attracts a special breed. But in no field of human endeavor has the almighty ego been so institutionalized as in modern dance.

The history of modern dance is, in fact, a panorama of supercolossal and merely giant-size egos; firebrand revolutionaries unable to survive under the status quo; radicals drawing on their own bodies for new techniques of movement, plumbing their own psyches for rationales for the new orders they devised. Without their determination there would be no art. Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, José Limón, Lester Horton, Merce Cunningham and Paul Taylor were all dancer-choreographers; Alwin Nikolais is a designer-composer-choreographer—and each, to a greater or lesser degree, contributed by breaking sharply with the previous generation, or with contemporaries, to go it alone. And their number keeps coming on.

If going it alone has been the "good news" of modern dance it has been the "bad news" as well. In ballet companies, a repertory of works by several choreographers is taken for granted. Performing in a variety of styles and working with different choreographers enlarges and en-

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riches dancers; audiences thrive on the variety as well. But to the "rugged individualists" of modern dance, "rep" has been anathema; and each dancer-choreographer has followed the perverse tradition of organizing a company of partisans to perform his or her own works exclusively. Fledgling choreographers, unable to experiment within their own ranks, leave, form their own exclusive companies and repeat the pernicious cycle. The resulting Johnny-one-note programs, presented by talents interested only in blowing their own horns, predictably have not won wide support.

Ailey is a dance revolutionary of a different sort. He is trying to bring choreographers together. His energies have gone toward building a modern-dance repertory company that would perform the important works of the past, as well as commission new ones. Nine choreographers other than Ailey were represented in the past season. Along with the diversity of programs, another factor in the company's success is the high caliber of the dancers, most notably Dudley Williams, Mari Kajiwara, Sara Yarborough and Judith Jamison — modern dance's first box-office star, whose solo "Cry," to Ailey choreography, can assure a sold-out house (nearly 3,000 seats at City Center). With the company enlarged to 25, multiple casting—familiar to ballet but not modern dance —now puts even the top dancers on their mettle.

"In the early forties," Walter Terry recalls, "Michel Fokine happily defined the modern technique as 'ugly girl with ugly hips and ugly legs making ugly movements,' and I can remember when, if a Graham dancer took a ballet class and she heard about it, that dancer was out—a separatist philosophy shared by those in ballet."

Although hostilities have ceased, a certain chill still prevails; the choreographers who move easily between ballet and modern companies are relatively few. To Ailey, who began his training in California with Lester Horton's company, where ballet and ethnic influences were welcomed, the East Coast enemy camps seemed absurd. His ideal dancer is trained equally in classical ballet and Graham technique. ("Then, if they're talented, they can do anything.")

Most of modern dance's historic dancer - choreogra-

phers were driven by a desire to be not only the single creative force in their respective companies, but also the performing star. Many, unwilling to transfer their roles, danced on past the peak of their performing powers.

In 1965, Ailey, then 34, stopped dancing. "I wanted to be a choreographer. But if you dance, too, it's a different ball-game. You start competing with the kids in your own company. From out front, I can look at Dudley and say, 'God, isn't he beautiful.' But if I were dancing" — Ailey roars with laughter—"I'd say, 'Oh hell, he'd better get in the back.'"

**O**N a junior-high school class trip to the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, Ailey discovered not only ballet but the theater section of Los Angeles where every Saturday afternoon something was going on. "I first saw the Dunham company there. I went over on day and there were pictures of black dancers!"

In high school, he played some football, went out for gymnastics and track, and imitated Gene Kelly in the backyard. "One day a friend showed me some movements from a class he was taking and I nearly fainted. I said, 'Oh my God, what is that?' And he said, 'That's modern dancing.'"

So Ailey began watching classes at Lester Horton's school and, after high school graduation in 1949, enrolled for a month. He dropped out of the school when he entered U.C.L.A. to study Romance languages.

The next several years were a loving-but-leaving period for Ailey with the Horton school. He was deeply impressed by the atmosphere of the studio — a world where painting, books, music, art and current events were all considered as important as dance and part of it; and where everyone worked on all aspects of production in addition to dancing. But he felt he wasn't good enough to be a dancer, and didn't know yet that he wanted to be a choreographer.

In 1953, after a series of odd jobs and some semesters at U.C.L.A., Los Angeles City College and San Francisco State, Ailey succumbed and returned to the Horton studio. Later that year, Horton died and, "to fill the vacuum," Ailey became the company's artistic director and choreographed his first dances. "The night before rehearsals

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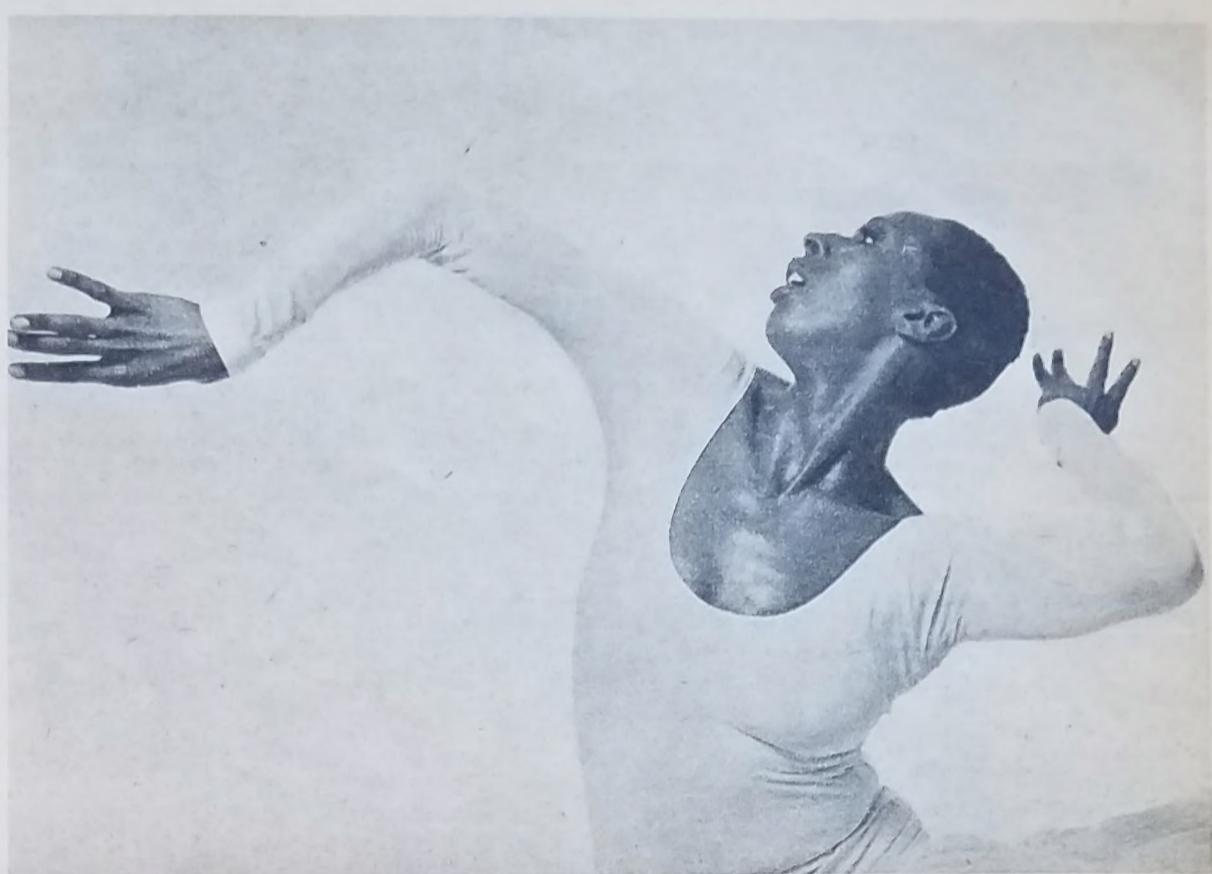
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### 'Cry'



Judith Jamison in the Ailey work that made her modern dance's first box-office star.

started I slept in the studio so I wouldn't be late. Rehearsals started at 2:00 P.M.!"

In 1954, Ailey and Carmen de Lavallade, also of the Horton company, came to New York to be leading dancers in the Broadway musical "House of Flowers." Ailey began a frenzied course of study—modern dance with Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, Charles Weidman; ballet with Karel Shook; composition with Doris Humphrey; acting with Stella Adler and Milton Katselas—and he appeared in several Off Broadway and Broadway shows as an actor and dancer.

After the Ailey company's 1958 one-night debut at the 92d Street "Y," things fell into a disconcerting rut. One or two performances in New York each season, a few more in scattered places around the country, triumph upon triumph abroad—held over for six weeks in London, 61 curtain calls in Hamburg—and return to New York to disband for lack of work.

In January, 1969, the company played one week at the Billy Rose Theater to smashing notices. That spring they were invited to become residents at the Brooklyn Academy of Music—an uneasy relationship that lasted for three seasons.

Early in 1970, arrangements had been made for the troupe to visit Russia in the fall as part of a Soviet-American cultural exchange pact. But in April, dissatisfied with the

Brooklyn affiliation, with meager bookings to carry the company till the Russian engagement, Ailey called a press conference and announced he was permanently dissolving the company at the end of the week. "He held up the State Department," critic Don McDonagh smiles, clearly indicating the bandit was a "good guy." Ailey admits he was using political muscle, but insists that, after 12 years, he was really ready to give up.

Like the cavalry, the State Department—which had previously sent the company on successful tours to the Far East in 1962, the World Festival of Negro Arts at Dakar, Senegal, in 1966, and East and West Africa in 1967—came through. It arranged an Ailey tour of North Africa.

Then, autumn in Russia. "The last night in Leningrad the audience wouldn't go home," Ailey grins. "They stood and screamed and clapped. I got down into the orchestra pit and signed autographs. I signed people's arms, calendars and programs. It was beautiful." The company was the first American attraction to appear on Moscow television and was seen by 22 million viewers. "At the Moscow closing, I did a Judy Garland, sitting on the edge of the stage after 30 curtain calls."

News of the company's unprecedented reception did not go unnoticed at home and it was booked for two weeks at the ANTA Theater in January, 1971. During the first week of the engagement, Ailey and some of his dancers appeared on the "Today" show. "The next night the lobby was so full of people I couldn't get in," says Ivy Clarke, the company's general manager. "Leonard Bernstein was there, the Beautiful People were there, people were there. At the end of the performance they were all screaming. By Monday of the second week there wasn't a ticket left. Nothing. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it." And so after 13 years, the Ailey company became an overnight sensation.

**T**HE Alvin Ailey

American Dance

Theater was an all-black company until 1964. "Then I met some incredible dancers of other colors who could cut the work. Also, we were running into reverse racism. On our Asian tour in '62, people kept saying about my pieces and Talley Beatty's pieces—'Oh, they're wonderful, but only black people can do jazz.' I don't think black dancers should be limited that way."

"There's a well-known choreographer who says black people in 'Swan Lake' are historically inaccurate. Well, then white people and Orientals in 'Revelations' are historically inaccurate—but it works anyway. It's like saying only French people should do Racine or Molière. Black people are not historically inaccurate."

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rate, but we have been historically ignored."

Ailey has choreographed only two ballets that can be termed political: "Mingus Dances," with music by Charlie Mingus, was created for the Joffrey Ballet in October, 1971; and "Masekela Langage," with music by South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela, was first performed in 1969 and revived last season. "I haven't forgotten segregated schools, or what L.A. was like in the fifties," Ailey says. "If you were out after 10 or 11 at night, you were stopped on the street and asked for identification. In certain areas, they'd take you to jail 'on suspicion.'

"Listen, I had a bout with the police here in New York—in 1967. I left The Ginger Man at about 12:30 A.M. and was walking home—65th Street between Central Park West and Columbus—when a police car started following me. They called me over, shined a flashlight in my eyes, and one of the men said, 'This is the guy. I recognize him.' A few minutes later I was on the floor of the police station, handcuffed, and getting kicked in places that don't show bruises. I thought this is it, nobody knows I'm here; they can kill me. Finally a sergeant came in and discovered there had been a mistake—I had my passport with me. But since I'd been detained for an hour, there had to be a charge. They decided I'd pushed an officer against the car. So I spent a night in the Tombs for 'pushing an officer.' The police had been looking for a black man with a mustache and beard who killed four policemen in Cincinnati. My lawyer was so incensed he wanted to sue the city. But I was leaving on a seven-month State Department tour the next week. So we dropped it."

**A**LVIN AILEY'S future appears bright. The Australian Ballet, the Deutsche Oper in Berlin, the Batsheva Dance Company of Israel and the San Francisco Ballet are all eager to have his services. The company, off on tour, will most likely be winning excellent notices, selling out—and losing money. It is a grim picture, but not new. The arts are a deficit operation, one that needs public, private and governmental support to survive.

Al Holtz is the controller of the Dance Theater Foundation, a nonprofit public foundation, parent organization of

the company and the school. "In terms of public response, critical acclaim and artistic achievement, we're an unqualified success. As for our financial situation—catastrophe. The New York State Council on the Arts gave us \$100,000 for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1972. That saved us from going under."

Since 1971, Dance Theater Foundation has received aid from the New York State Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Noble Foundation and the Howard Bayne Fund. Public contributions rose from \$1,500 in 1970 to \$12,000 in 1972. Ailey's personal donation was \$10,000. "For the fiscal year that ended March, 1972, we had a \$30,000 debt. Compare that with any ballet company and that's nothing. One foundation gave us money for a new Ailey work. I used it to pay old bills. Did they get their new Ailey work? Of course, but they wouldn't have if we hadn't paid the phone bill first. Somewhere it may not be legal. But neither is not paying dancers. I think people should be told the facts."

Ailey himself says he's "been beating the gong" about foundations' neglect of modern dance in favor of the ballet for years. He is mournful, too, that funds are more readily available for new works than for securing those of the past. (Last season, under the title "Roots of the American Dance," the company revived Katherine Dunham's "Choros," last performed in New York in 1954; and Ted Shawn's "Kinetic Molpai," not seen here since 1940.)

"How can foundations ignore this important American invention?" Ailey asks. "I just don't understand it. I don't understand why Martha Graham doesn't have anything she wants. Look at the legacy she created. I don't understand why there isn't a Martha Graham Dance Theater; there's a Helen Hayes Theater. Look at what Graham has done. Look at what has come from her. This woman is like Picasso and Stravinsky."

"It sounds so corny, but I hope I can look back in a few years and think what we're doing here with our school and our company is celebrating the beauty of the human spirit, of people coming together and accomplishing something. I think people are sanest when they're working together creatively. That's the act we live every day in the studio." ■